

NEVER FORGOTTEN.

NEVER FORGOTTEN.

A STORY.



BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A.,

AUTHOR OF "BELLA DONNA," ETC

A New Edition, carefully Revised.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1887.

(ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN "ALL THE YEAR ROUND.")

Inscribed

TO

CHARLES DICKENS, ESQ.,

AS A SMALL TOKEN

OF

VERY GREAT REGARD AND ADMIRATION.



NEVER FORGOTTEN.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

EASTPORT.

A FEW cottages—scattered like odd grains of corn along a short strip of English coast—after a rickety and precarious infancy, had grown up into a village. With such nutriment as fishing and smuggling, it became a strong child. Later, in the war times, it was fancied by the military authorities: a fort and large barracks were built, and soldiers sent. From that moment it became respectable, and was called Eastport. In a short time it was timidly advancing to the grade of watering-place—a shy *débutante*—raised from the ranks, and apparently as ill at ease in its new finery of dotted villas and dampish plaster terraces, as the sergeant who has been made uncomfortable by a commission. But in ten years more its patent would be regularly made out, and it would be enrolled permanently among the dignified watering-places. The threads of railway were already converging and gathering up there, as into a hand. Beading after beading of snow-white terraces would embroider the edges of the cliffs. A monster hotel, as white and bright as if it were every morning burnished by mammoth housemaids, and teeming with life like a monster warren, would have burst out on the hill, and noble persons have poured in, and have been cramped in tight drawing-rooms, scented with new plaster, at twenty guineas a week. A glistening strand reclaimed from ugly boulders, would have burst into gay files of sentry-boxes or

wheels, travelling out in the sun to the deeper waters, and have become an animated encampment, where the splash and the plunge marked time, and where countless novels and newspapers would be read to the pleasant music of children's prattle and young ladies' voices.

But that moment had not yet come. The fairy queen of fashion, always fanciful and arbitrary, had not yet let her robe fall upon this corner, nor touched it with her golden wand. She had not given the signal for the rush. So it lay now in a state of comparative squalor, enjoying a sort of vegetable life—just as its half-dozen stranded fishing-boats lay over on their sides in a helpless and sluggish imbecility. A little pier straggled out awkwardly and timorously to sea: but by-and-by there would be a vote in Parliament, and a new harbour, and fast sailing-packets shooting across with mails to the Dutch and Belgian coasts opposite.

On the lowest tier, next the shore, were the fishermen's huts. A couple of sloping roads ran up the cliffs like ribbons, and became disorderly streets, and on the top the bits of terraces and strips of villas broke out in spasmodic fashion. These were in such white patches, with such sudden gaps—where an ambitious speculator who had gone in for an entire terrace had been compelled to stop short ingloriously—that the whole cliff seemed like one gigantic jaw smiling at the sky, with teeth knocked out here and there. The barracks and fort were far away to the right, on another cliff that looked as soft and crumbly and friable as a crag of ripe old dinner cheese.

In this way the settlement gradually retreated inland, and the sea colony was linked by a chain of houses—straggling like videttes—to a genuine country town about a mile away. The country town was proud of its watering-place, and lived and had its being by two artificial stimulants—one a foot regiment and some artillerymen, whose officers were precious to the neighbourhood; the other a steeple-chase of some mark, which annually brought down a strange miscellany, who for a couple of nights swarmed over the little town, and utilised even its haylofts. As yet life was to be enjoyed there with economy, and it was therefore in esteem with many genteel families whose means were not on the same high level as their gentility. Life, too, was strongly savoured by the presence of the officers. The warm tint of their dress became necessary to the landscape, as an agreeable patch of colour, and lit it up as the late Mr. Turner did a dull sea-piece—with a vermilion buoy.

In these barracks—which were rude and almost squalid in their discomfort, and described a dozen times in each day as “this d—d infernal hole”—one night Captain Fermor and a friend, who was called “young Brett,” were sitting at the fire. The daily feast was done, and those who had feasted were scattered. “Young Brett” was a new ensign, white-haired to a strange degree, and half a child in appearance, but he was full of respect and admiration for men of experience like the Mentor beside him. The Mentor beside him was very fair, and pervaded by a general yellow tone—with a corn-coloured moustache. His legs were upon a chair, and on his lips was a steady air of composed indifference and almost habitual disgust.

The fledgeling ensign’s enthusiasm was not yet chilled. He was describing a hunt.

“We then went right through the Old Field,” he said, “up to the brook which runs into the mill-race, where there is *such* a stiff jump—and such a fall! You never saw such a business: every second fellow down. Old Bowley was well pounded.”

“They don’t know how to ride,” said Captain Fermor, tranquilly.

“I went over with the rest,” said the white boy, a little ruefully, “and got such a ducking! Some one pulled me out. That beast I rode pulled so.”

“Some way it always *is* the beast we ride,” said the other, with the same inert smile. “But it’s not a country for a gentleman to hunt over. I had to give it up myself. You know *I’ve* seen the proper sort of thing. Who were out?”

“The usual lot; and that Hanbury, as usual, leading. *He* got over the brook. But then he rides such horses!”

The right side of the other’s lip went up a little at this speech, and he raised himself in his chair.

“Of course he did! These bumpkins can scramble over every drain in the place. I have broken a horse’s back before now over a little furrow. Any fool can make a show on a great strong brute that knows every stone and hedge. If I chose, I suppose I could do it with the best of ’em. But it wouldn’t repay me the trouble.”

Captain Fermor had an eye-glass which he used occasionally, being a little near-sighted; but he had another moral bit of crystal, through which he unconsciously viewed his own personal nature. It was a sort of polite and social Pantheism. He really fancied that his “*ro εγω*,” as the Germans call it—the great “I,” the grand “Moi”—pervaded all things, and that every-

thing that was said or done, in which he was called on to speak or do, must have necessary reference to him.

"But he rode like a man," said the white-haired youth, with a thoughtful admiration, "all through the same—never thrown out a moment. I wonder what he gave for that horse? Two-two-nought?"

"Bred him, most likely,—bred him to sell. That is *his* line. It is the way with all these low farmer fellows."

"But you recollect the parson said the other day he was of good family—Sir Thomas Hanbury—or somebody like that."

"That don't make him a good huntsman," asked Captain Fermor, smiling, "does it? You are a wonderful logician!" Then added, "It's nothing to me who he is, or what he is; I don't care, I'm sure."

The white ensign, still following his hero with a smile of admiration as he flew over a jump, went on the same key of panegyric, "As I was coming home dead beat (would you believe it?), I saw his horse at the gate of that terrace where those girls live—Raglan-terrace—and he himself with them in the window, just as fresh as if he were out of his bath."

Captain Fermor gave a sort of short contemptuous sniff, and his fawn-coloured moustache, which hung over his mouth went up again. One limb, too, dropped off the chair. But he said nothing.

"They say he's going to be married to one of them," said the ensign; "the younger one, so the doctor told me to-day. But mind, don't say I said it, because it may be only a bit of gossip."

The way in which Captain Fermor opened his aluminium-looking eyes on the youth, was something to see. "Why should I, pray?" he said. "Whom should I tell, anyone? I suppose I shall have forgotten it all in five minutes. What on earth, my good child, can you suppose these people and their stories are to *me*? It is very well for you, who have seen no life as yet. You may be quite easy in your mind, and tell your apothecary or parson—whose names, thank God, I don't know—that their secret is quite safe with me—because quite forgotten."

The boy coloured up, and became pink at his forehead, which contrasted oddly with his white hair. Captain Fermor, really pleased with himself for having spoken with such success and such an undercurrent of quiet sarcasm, became of a sudden free and good-humoured.

"And so you saw these girls? They *are* pretty," he said, making that allowance.

"Yes, yes!" said the other, eagerly; "there's one *very* handsome. I wish—I wish," he added, "I knew her. I have tried every way. But *I am told* they won't know people."

"I could have known them fifty times over if I wanted," said Captain Fermor. "There were people plaguing me a dozen times. But *I* don't care for that sort of thing. It's not my line, you see. Made it a rule not to make new acquaintances more than I can manage. People say to me, I wish you would let us introduce you to the—the—what do you call them?"

"Manuels! Manuels!" said the youth.

"But I don't want to. I don't care. There *are* fellows who want to know all the world. I'm not one of that sort."

"Oh," said the young ensign, with an unconscious piteousness, "if I could only manage it! They are so handsome; and if I could get to know them! If you could only——"

"Out of the question, my good Brett," said Captain Fermor, becoming cold again. "I never do that sort of thing, unless for friends, you know. Besides, take my advice; don't trouble your head about that direction. I fancy you would scarcely be the description of thing for them, you see."

In many of those people in whom personality or this organic egotism is strong, a sort of cruel truth breaks out, almost "brutal," as the French put it. But it is only a logical development, and really almost unconscious. From it the white-haired ensign suffered, and there was silence in consequence for a few moments. Captain Fermor, still in good humour, was still thinking how placidly he could turn a bit of quiet, gentlemanly sarcasm. A tranquil smile was mantling about his mouth, and broke through the blue clouds of his cigar, like a little human sun.

"I suppose," he said, after a time, and taking his cigar out to look at it narrowly—"I suppose that strong-built brute of his will be entered for the steeple-chase?"

"Yes," said the youth, shortly, and there was a wounded modulation in the key. But the captain, wrapped up in his egotistic cloak, had now travelled miles from any results his speech might have produced.

"And I suppose," added the captain, "that fellow Banbury—Hambury—will ride him?"

"Yes," said the youth, a little more heartily, and trying to forget his hurt, for his soul was in horses. "Oh, he'll ride. They'll be very good this year. I shall ride!"

The captain smiled. Here was another opportunity for strolling his satirical blade.

"Of course they will be good, *because* you ride, eh? You will draw the whole country. Don't you see what you lay yourself open to by that loose form of speech? I merely call your attention to it as a friend. Of course it's no affair of mine."

"Yes, I see. But they are to be first-rate. I have entered Kathleen, and Taylor has entered Malakoff. I am in already for the Welter—all gentlemen riders, you know."

Again the captain began to whet his razor.

"Gentlemen riders! Then they must let no natives enter. Good gracious! what a lot of creatures will start!" And again he smiled to himself. It was good practice turning this raw child to profit.

"Brian is to be in," said young Brett, still on the horses, "and Small will ride him himself."

"Ah! that is a horse," said Captain Fermor, taking his cigar out of his mouth with real interest. "How he will cut up the local fellows! And a man that can ride—very tolerably. He'll give them a lesson." Here Captain Fermor took a weary stretch, as if life under this accumulation of monotony was indeed a burden.

And yet, taking the average of his days, and the duties with which he filled in his days, he seemed to enter into its current with something far short of indifference. The truth was, this was only the fruit of his extravagant egotism. For his corps the genuine race of the world was the race that wore uniforms; that is to say, the men whose uniform was scarlet. Other soldiers of other countries were mere impostors,—theatrical fellows with gaudy coats. It was notorious there was but one real "Service" known, which was the British. Thus, the bulk of English mankind who did not bear commissions were cagots, and the onus of respectability lay upon them. Again, as with the regiment, so with Captain Fermor. Town was the centre, the city of true metal. Town things, bought in Town shops—bought, too, at the places where "our fellows" were accustomed to buy—the true Procrustean gauge to which all things must be stretched or fitted—this was Captain Fermor's creed. Yet he was a gentlemanly devotee, and did not rant these tenets; but they were so kneaded into his constitution, air, and deportment, that everything he said, and everything he did, seemed to whisper an article of this faith.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

THE MANUELS.

IN the window of that miniature house in Raglan-terrace, where Young Brett had seen the admired horse standing, were the ladies of the Manuel family. The house was Number Four, in one of those terraces which had started so magnificently—intending a swoop of at least a street long, but had halted at Number Four, through a sudden spasm. In the window was Mrs. Manuel,—a short, handsome, olive-toned, elderly lady, whose hair was iron-grey, and whose eyes travelled faintly from east to west, and back again, but whose face had a worn look of suffering. There was also Violet, her second daughter; and Pauline, her eldest, now flashing out in the sunlight, was framed in the window. There admiring Young Brett saw her, in a window to herself, looking out at the noble horse, and falling into a true statuesque attitude—into which she fell unconsciously some dozen times in the day.

Young Brett looked wistfully, and languished to know her. But for him, and for such as him, Number Four was as a convent of the very strictest order. The face of the second daughter, whom they called Violet, was soft, round, and full, with a strange bright glistening in her eyes, which were large and “fine.” About her altogether there was a sense of rich colour, with a sort of soft, sweet, devotional air, as though she had been copied from a saint on an old Italian church wall.

The hall door was open as Young Brett passed: and coming out with Hanbury, to feel that great horse all over, with that wonder and respect which foreigners have for great English horses, was a son of the house, with black glossy hair that shone and curled, with a faint olive tint about the cheeks, square heavy eyebrows, bluish shading on cheeks and upper lip, where moustache would later ripen and flourish, and a thoughtful business air beyond his years.

He felt and patted the stout strong horse all over. Then Hanbury—an over-healthy, pink-cheeked, open-faced man of the country, mounted into his saddle with some pride, for he knew that eyes were upon him, and took off his hat to the windows, with an emphasis towards that on the left, where the full-eyed girl was with her mother. Then he made his horse amble and plunge gently, yet with grace, for some purpose of

his own, struggling with him in a sort of sham contest, and finally, as it were, let him have his way, and plunge off in a dignified canter. All this Young Brett saw, as he had seen many such kindred scenes, with a sort of aching. He pined with a boyish pining for ladies' company, and longed to play at knights and social jousts in the drawing-room.

Manuel—the gossips told each other—had been a sort of Anglo-Spanish merchant, who had lived years at Cadiz, and had married a Spanish woman. Wine was his profession, and in that faith he had lived and died, sending home butts and casks every week. To the figures that flitted round in the little watering-place, this meagre detail had travelled; and, meagre as it was, no one knew how it had been found out. Still, it was welcome as far as it went. And one more skilful discoverer than the rest was able to point to some cloud or mystery which hung between them and Mr. Manuel's end. For it was ascertained that the butts and casks had broken up suddenly, and in that wreck the merchant had disappeared. In short, there was a story and mystery, or there should be a story and mystery, which, being unresolved, caused much torture and suffering in the neighbourhood. Public interest in their regard was the more inflamed by the jealous reserve they maintained in their plaster-covered little castle on Raglan-terrace. The whole colony struggled to know them, men made violent efforts to pour in and carry an acquaintance by assault, but ineffectually. Only Mr. John Hanbury, who rode the admired horse, had found some breach through which he had stolen in.

It seemed natural enough to those who knew him well; for he was penetrated through and through with a blunt gentleness and simplicity which, of all characters in daily currency, is the most acceptable, and makes the most way. The plated artificial world likes this sort of nature, and inhales it as it does a sea-breeze at Brighton. He had been in India in some civil station, had broken down physically, and had come home, thirty-eight years old, with six feet of height, broad shoulders, a square, rather massive face, a large kindly eye, black glossy hair, and a black moustache as glossy. He delighted in sport, had some dozen guns or so on his shelves with which he had shot the tiger and the elephant, and respected the character of a brave and upright horse pretty much as he did that of an upright Christian. He spoke with an earnestness verging upon dignity, and for him the buffoonery argot, called "chaff," nursery language of wirlings, was hopelessly unintelligible.

That admired horse, The Baron, ambled up to Raglan-terrace very often—nearly every day. Its rider and owner came yet more often. The dust-men and dust-women of gossip, who went about with baskets on their shoulders and a hook, picking up old torn shreds and scraps and tossing them into their baskets, met the party often on the roads and cliffs. It was given out, officially as it were, that a marriage must follow; and the eagerness for original details as to the Manuals' history became almost exquisite. Any damaging scraps of whisper about their early days would be most precious now.

Captain Fermor, who spent a great deal of his day in a curious listlessness, lounging along the roads, and sitting a good deal on a low wall by the roadside in the sun, busy with some of the new books he got down from town—a polite Crusoe cast adrift on this savage district—strange to say, took a greater interest in these ladies than he had acknowledged to his friend Young Brett. He had got to be fond of his wall, and sat there pretty much about the same hour each day. He had come to know the sisters thoroughly, their walk even half a mile away, their favourite bonnets, their clothes. He really admired "that second girl," and the sleepy dreamy languor of her eyes, and he half indulged himself in a speculation how, with proper dressing and training, under good masters of fashion, "that girl" might "do" up in Town. But he soon checked himself, almost with a blush, for this heresy—as if anything good *could* come out of barren provincialism.

The two girls tripping past—and they stepped together as sisters do, with the harmony of well-trained ponies—soon came to know the fair officer who swung his limbs upon the wall, quite as well as he knew them. At first they did not learn his name, but this some way reached them in time. There are plenty of such surface intimacies. As they walked past they dropped their eyes with a modest precision, but there was a forced composure about their faces that looked like consciousness. Captain Fermor suspended his reading, and looked long after them with tranquil approval.

By-and-by, as Mr. Hanbury walked by with them very often this expression changed. Man does not relish man's familiarity with any of the other sex. It seems a sort of preference after rivalry; and though this view is really absurd, and based upon a fiction, it operates very largely. So at first Captain Fermor's lip used to curl contemptuously, as who should say, "A fellow like that!" Then he grew more hostile, and as one

day, Hanbury, full of smiles, was stooping well across the sisters, as he walked, in his eagerness in what he told, and as they listened with smiles and an interest that showed clearly they had taken no note of the captain upon his wall, the latter broke out quite loudly with "A low boor of a fellow!" Though why boor, and why low, there was no reason for pronouncing. Nay, he took this prejudice actually away with him from his wall; and when some one was criticising (a little unfairly) the riding of Mr. Hanbury, Captain Fermor joined in with a light growl, and repeated his censure that he was "a boor of a fellow!" So, as there are surface intimacies among people who are never to know each others' minds, so are there these surface animosities. What irritated the captain specially was the unconscious way in which the almost gentle blue eye of his enemy used to settle on him—if anything, with a kindly leaning towards him. This the other resented the more, and felt his lip curling up with contempt.

But the summit of unreasonable exasperation was reached, when Mr. Hanbury was seen riding by with the two young ladies. Captain Fermor almost raged against this outrage on decorum. "In Town," he said, "or, indeed, in any civilised place, it would be screamed at. Two girls going out with a man like that; no lady with them. It was a pity," he added, with compassion, "they had no friend to hint to them what was proper. Any fellow, that at all approached a gentleman, would not allow them to compromise themselves like that." And when the marriage rumour reached him, his scorn and amazement could not be contained.

There were other characters on these little provincial boards, invariably to be found on such occasions: types kept in stock, who will drop in presently. Such were doctor and doctor's wife; clergyman and wife; local solicitor in large business, often flying up to London; and the landed gentry, whose nearest representative was Sir Charles Longman, of Longwood. These threads of different colours crossed and recrossed each other, and became plaited together into a sort of dull monotonous strand, which was Life at Eastport. Life, in fact, oozed on here pleasantly for some—tranquilly at least for all. Periodically Sir Charles Longman broke into a spasm of a dinner out at Longwood, and had an artillery officer, and an infantry officer, with the parson and the doctor, and a solemn and impressive ceremonial ensued; when Sir Charles Longman, tall and well creased in his skin, and shining as though he had got into a suit of serpent's skin,

peered at every one through a very glistening eye-glass, as though he were afraid of mistaking them. His voice came out so aridly, it seemed to have newly arrived from the Desert, and dried up all within the area of its influence like a hot wind. The soldiers went home loudly execrating host and entertainment, but Captain Fermor relished both with a smile of superiority, and said it was refreshing to meet a gentleman and gentlemen—and breathe the air of a gentleman's house—after all.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

A MESS DINNER.

THE barracks, which were the vital organs of the place, and the very centre of its nervous system, were austere and sour looking. They were buildings constructed as if for the reformation of the hardened soldiery who resided in them. Like the men themselves, they seemed to fall into line, to deploy into white galleries, windows, doors, chill-looking iron-bedsteads, arches, whitewashed passages, and numbered cell boxes. As there was properly no flesh and blood in the place to be taken notice of officially by the authorities, but merely letters and numbers, so the same system was reasonably extended to the bedsteads, passages, arches, and even dead walls.

The barracks were on a hill commanding the town, and had been fashioned irresolutely into a sort of fort. When the sun was shining, little lengths of scarlet ribbon were seen to unwind themselves on the walls, like a cheerful edging to a dull grey surtout, attended also by lively drumming, and the winding of trumpets. In this sort of clumsily disguised reformatory the soldiers took their punishment, were drilled, snapped at with words of command, and, above all, "inspected."

Which serious operation was now just being performed. It was a dépôt, and samples of several regiments were here herded together for training and exercise. Major-General Shortall had come down; a gaunt, red-cheeked man, with what used to be called the mutton-chop whisker, and who was determined to do his all to save the Service from the destruction to which it was hurrying—by keeping his upper lip clean and bare. The men had been scrubbed, pipeclayed, French-polished, burnished,

holy-stoned even; had been reviled and sworn into perfect cleanliness, before General Shortall was taken down the ranks.

With a scowl of distrust, as though each private was busy hiding some breakage or stain, and might, after all, skilfully evade detection of his crime, the general walked down by a row of chests and faces, pried into buttons, twitched open cartouches-boxes, and pulled at straps sourly, then walked up past a row of backs, poked, probed, as if he were making a surgical examination, and finished off a line with an air of disappointment. Colonels and captains walked with him in agitation.

In the evening, General Shortall was to dine with the mess; so, also, was Sir Charles Longman, the generic territorial person of quality, and one or two gentlemen. The leading clergyman, too, had been "thrown in," just as the mess cook had "thrown in" a dash of wine to give a tone to the soup. It was a sort of little festival. The general, in a grudging sort of fashion, had allowed some commendation to be wrung from him, in which the words "efficient" and "soldier-like" were distinguishable. Thus there was a weight of care off the minds of the superior officers.

Like two kings at a conference, Sir Charles Longman and General Shortall met on the rug, as at a free town. Colonel Benbow presented them to each other. The general said he had known a Longman in "my old regiment" in Jamaica; and Sir Charles, promptly fixing his glass in position, and painfully investigating the general all over, said doubtfully, "that he—er—believed—quite—really most curious." They went into dinner then, in a sort of clanking procession.

Such splendour as the dépôt could compass was put forward. Two silver soldiers, back to back, in full marching order, with knapsack and straps all complete, with the minutest buckle, exquisitely modelled, had been presented by Colonel Bolstock, C.B., to his regiment on leaving; and the two silver soldiers, leaning on their firelocks, mounted guard at the head of the table, under the general's eye. The study of the accoutrements, as here reproduced, was an inexhaustible source of delight to the officers. It never palled, and it was customary to refer to it as a standard for other works of art. But the general had the silver soldiers under inspection, and pronounced sharply that the belt of "that fellow on the right" might have been tightened by another "hole;" which critical bon-mot soon trickled down the whole table, and was greatly admired. For weeks an ani-

mated discussion took place after dinner as to the propriety of this tightening by "another hole;" and the most ingenious tests were suggested to find out the truth.

As they were sitting down, Captain Fermor came in hurriedly, and found there was but one little gap near the bottom of the table, into which he dropped. One flank of the gap was red, the other black; and just as he sat down, and waiter hands had pushed in his chair from behind, he found that the black civilian patch resolved itself into "that boor of a fellow," Hanbury!

The mere contagion of the thing was not so much; for once he could have put up with this sort of society. But the awkwardness was here: "this fellow" was sure "to fasten" an acquaintance on him, "what, positively," as he declared afterwards, "he had been struggling with all his power to fence off," but which *he knew* all the time—he had a presentiment, in fact—would come about.

Honest John Hanbury's face actually lit up when he saw who was his companion. He was delighted, for he was of the line of Uncle Toby.

"Captain Fermor," he said, at once, and very heartily, "we *ought* to know each other. It is so droll meeting and passing each other in that sort of way, and knowing each other, all the time. It is absurd. You know me, and I know you. I am so glad, in short. This is better than half a dozen introductions."

The captain's lip went up coldly. "Oh, I see. Indeed! You are very good to say so."

The other assumed that there was corresponding joy at this pleasant dinner consanguinity. "Yes," he went on, "the very thing I was wishing for, and all brought about so naturally—without trouble. Do you know, fifty times I have been on the point of walking up to you and saying, 'Captain Fermor, let me introduce myself.' I should have surprised you, I dare say."

The captain's eyes first settled on Mr. Hanbury's drop chain, then travelled up slowly to his face. "I must say you would," he said;—"excuse me for telling you so frankly;" and Captain Fermor grew a shade less ill humoured as he thought how gentlemanly sarcastic he could be at times. (This was where he was so much above "our fellows," who put anything offensive all in the rough and in brute shape.)

Though he had unconsciously stepped into a social ice-pail, Hanbury did not begin to feel the freezing as yet. "I declare

we are always talking of you. I should not betray secrets, but we are. We know you perfectly, meeting you so constantly—on that wall, you know. Ha! ha!"

"Most flattering of you and your family to take such an interest in me—very."

"Family!" said the other, laughing. "Come, that is good! Come now, as if you don't know who I mean!"

Anything like rallying came on Fermor like an east wind. "I really don't understand," he said nervously. "I take my walks, and read—and don't trouble myself with all I meet."

"That is a wonderful horse of yours, Mr. Hanbury," struck in a young officer from the other side. "Great quarters! So close and brought together!"

Every one here broke in with delight on this topic. A conversational sluice had been lifted, and talk poured out. Horse or horsemanship is the one touch of nature that makes all the man world a kin.

"What would you take for him?" "Good action!" "Showy!" "How many hands high?" "Off pastern!" "In for the National?"

Hanbury, a good fellow, put his foot in the stirrup, mounted, and rode his beast up and down the table for them; that is, he told them all details with fulness and with delight. "Yes," he said, "I have entered him. I really have. I shall ride him myself."

"And win, by Jove!" said Young Brett, enthusiastically.

"Well," said Hanbury, with an expression of pleased doubt, "these things are so risky, and one never knows; but I *hope* to do respectably. You have seen him?" he said, turning to Captain Fermor. "Oh! of course you have."

"Seen what, pray? Oh, that horse of yours? Well—yes—I believe so. I see so many horses, you know——"

"Of course he has," said Young Brett, with the same enthusiasm, "and, by Jove, don't he admire him! He told me so over and over again."

Fermor measured Young Brett as if for the rack. The look made him penitent on the spot. "I suppose I see so many horses; but I really have not thought of the matter at all."

"Oh, but you *must* see him—see him regularly. He's worth a study, I can tell you. Let me see—to-morrow! I tell you what—I'll ride him down here."

Forsyth, another horse devotee, and pious in the faith, said, "Come at two, and have lunch."

"Ah, thank you," said Hanbury, very earnest about his charger, "I will. Though, by the way——" and he started. "No, I can't at two. I have," he said, with smiling confidence, as it were, to Fermor, "to go out with the two girls, you know. By-the-bye," he added, still in his cloak of simplicity, "that reminds me. I declare you ought to know them."

"Indeed! Ought I?" said he, with an expression which was meant to be that of "amused surprise." "Well, granting that, to whom do you allude, pray?"

("I can play on this fellow," he said to himself, with satisfaction, "as upon a piano," which was scarcely a wise conviction, for he could only "strum" upon the piano, and in human music he was but an indifferent player.)

"Oh, the Manuels, to be sure," said the Piano, not seeing that it was being played on. "As I said, it is so odd, almost so droll, meeting in that funny way. We have discussed you very often, I can tell you."

Something like "too much honour," or some such speech of ironical humility, was on the captain's lips; but, in spite of himself, he felt complacent. So he listened to hear more.

"Miss Manuel is very curious about you. She says she is sure, from your face——"

An expression of interest spread over Fermor's face. But there was a Thersites in the regiment, just opposite, rough, loud-speaking, rude, and horribly truthful, a graduated professor of "chaff," and he was listening. Fermor justly considered him a "low" fellow, but shrank from him as from a social chimney-sweep.

"She says!—just look at Fermor!" he said—"He thinks every young lady in love with him. He turns back on the roads if he meets one, for fear of disturbing her peace of mind.' Ha! ha!"

And a chorus of "Ha! ha's!" from the instrumentalists about, who relished this coarse music of Thersites, now broke out.

Fermor turned red. He made it a rule, he always said, to take no notice of these "low" jokes. But John Hanbury, being a simple good-humoured creature that knew how to laugh, *did* laugh now very loud. It seemed to him *such* a comical accident that Thersites should have actually stumbled on the true state of things.

"Why, as to walking along the roads, I can tell you something," he said, looking slyly at Fermor. "You know there's no hiding of one's face exactly——"

"Oh indeed!" said Thersites. "Was there ever anything like this? What did I say? Now we shall hear something." And the crowd rubbed its hands, and even struck its thighs with delight.

John Hanbury was one of those who innocently overlook what is strict propriety, in the satisfaction of giving pleasure to others. "I don't think it is quite fair," he said, looking from side to side; but since——"

Fermor was blazing and glowing. "I must request," he said, in a low hasty voice to his neighbour, "there will be no more of this. Do you hear me? I don't like it."

But Hanbury had been trained in wild places of India, where a joke, being a scarce thing, and, once trapped, is not enlarged without a sort of hunt. So he nodded his head pleasantly to the right and to the left, as if he had a secret, and said, "He doesn't like it, you see. It wouldn't be fair, you know."

Again the orchestra broke in, fortissimo, "Come, come! Nonsense! Out with it."

Major-General Shortall and Sir Charles Longman, who had long since strayed away and got lost in the bogs and marshes of conversation, where every step cost them infinite pain, heard the roar, and accepted it as though it were a walking-stick which some one held to help them out.

"Cheerful," said the general. "What is it?"

"Rather some joke, I think," said Sir Charles, doubtfully, and glueing on his eye-glass to try and get a good view of it.

"Oh, sir," said Captain Thersites, "only a good thing about Fermor. Tell it out—all out, Mr. Hanbury, the general wants to hear it."

Hanbury, still relishing the thing with delight, though, indeed, there was neither joke nor story in the whole, was about to begin, when he chanced to look at his neighbour, and saw his pained look and his curled lip. Fermor said, "If you will be so free with my name, at least I trust you will respect that of ladies——"

"Ah! don't mind him," roared the orchestra, suspecting what was going on. But this was a new view for Hanbury, who coloured in his turn. It was conveyed in an unpleasant, even an offensive manner, but the caution was just. His rough, coarse provincialism was stupidly making free with the sacred names of ladies he respected and admired. His face changed in a second.

"Let me suggest," said Fermor, seeing the effect, "a mess table is scarcely the place—you understand; but of course it is no concern of mine."

Nothing now could be got out of Hanbury. Disappointed, the crowd, led by Thersites, followed at the heels of Fermor. Once in six months or so they had their revenge in this shape for many supercilious outrages. Even the general was seen to smile in his dry way. Fermor glowed and grew white, and glowed again. He never forgave his neighbour.

The latter, quite sobered, whispered him earnestly, "Thank you a thousand times! I was so near doing it, and you saved me. I should never have forgiven myself." That depended very much on his own turn of mind; but he might be sure of this, that Captain Fermor would never forgive him that public mortification. But there was worse in store for Fermor.

"They have such odd words now," said General Shortall, talking of India—of course military India. "'Pon any soul, I can't make 'em out. I don't know what they will bring the Service to. They talk in the *Times* about wallahs and fellahs, and such stuff. Now, we always called them blacks simply, and niggers—and as good words as any, I say."

Captain Fermor, superior always, was literary and well read, getting down green cases from Mr. Mudie. Part of his ritual was setting "fellows" right on matters of information. So now, brooding and brooding over his injuries, he saw aid at hand, and listened.

"Wallah! What—er—is a wallah?" said Sir Charles.

"And I see they have fellows they call ryots," said the general. "Not but that they have plenty of 'em out there—disturbances enough." Which remark brought forth obsequious hilarity. When this had died away, Captain Fermor saw the opportunity for putting out Mr. Mudie's information to interest.

"They call a wallah, sir," he said, with quiet respect, "one of those unhappy creatures who are obliged to work at forced labour—at the Suez Canal, for instance."

"Ah, quite so," said Sir Charles, interested, making his glass adhere. "Most interesting."

"And a ryot," continued Fermor, half turning to him as an appreciative listener, "is, I believe, a—a man who works in the fields for a few pots of rice—one of the oppressed castes of India."

The colonel was looking round as if this explanation reflected great credit on the depôt, and the general seemed a little impressed, when John Hanbury, who had been listening with wonder and almost stupefaction, broke out with honest expostulation, "No, no, no! Come now. God bless us! what are

you talking of? That is the funniest jumble—I beg your pardon for saying so—but you're all astray. A ryot working for a pot of rice! I wish you or I were a ryot, good Lord! But Fermor is joking—I know he is."

Fermor's lip trembled a little. This was the fruit of being ever so little familiar with your low and free people!

"Why 'fellahs,'" continued Hanbury, laughing heartily, "are the Suez people. I wish a wallah heard you speak of him in that way, or a ryot either."

"There'd be a ryot, I suppose," said General Shortall, encouraged to repeat his joke.

"By Jove, yes! Why, they are farmers, cultivators, merchants. It's so funny how you contrived to jumble them."

"It may be funny," said Fermor, with an effort at calmness, "but with all respect to you, I think I'm right."

"Nonsense, you're not serious."

"Have you read, might I ask, Jenkinson's or Thurlowe's travels?" said Fermor, with chilly politeness.

"Not a line of 'em," said the other, laughing; "but if they say that, they're not worth reading."

"The world thinks differently," said Fermor, looking round with calm triumph. "Jenkinson is a *standard book*. I have the second edition up-stairs; got it down from London—from Mudie's. He travelled five years in India."

"If it comes to that," said Hanbury, with a good-humoured smile, "I was there five-and-twenty, but I don't go much upon that."

"Ha, ha!" said Thersites, "not bad that!"

The statement produced a weighty impression. "That settles it," added Thersites.

"By Jove!" said little Brett, suddenly, "how lucky! I have a little Hindustanee dictionary somewhere!"

There was a cry of "Fetch it! fetch it!"

It was fetched, but it confirmed Hanbury. Hanbury became the Moonshee or Pundit of the night, an office Fermor had always claimed. He suffered acutely. He saw the general whisper grimly to the chief with an inquiring smile, and he had a faithful instinct that this was about him.

Presently that potentate rose and went his way. The dining crowd dispersed. They brought away with them the honest John Hanbury into a snug private room, where they lounged and stretched themselves after the rigours of the night, and clouded the air with fumes of tobacco and spirits. These were

happy moments. The fighting men were 'boys again. They were attached by the genial simplicity of Hanbury, and the link was the horse. That noble brute was led out and admired over and over again. They became eloquent, witty, even wise, in that curious tongue. These simple natives interchanged the blank counters and cowries they had for ideas with a marvellous fluency. They talked of the "National," now close at hand, of the course, of the great horse Baron, of the great Irish horse that was coming, of the gentlemen riders, of the odds; then of the "Welter Stakes," and of a grievance against the "handicapper." And Hanbury, who in some other societies might have been insignificant and overlooked, riding in here on his horse, was immensely respected and hearkened to.

Fermor did not hear the last of that night's defeat for many days. In the barrack life there is a barrenness of incident, and this was welcome. He was sensitive to "low' chaff," and though he habitually awed them as being inferior in intellect, it made him shudder one day to hear a low "ungentlemanly" nickname associated with his own. "The Wallah" was actually profanely joined with his sacred being, and one morning he heard "fellows" below, in the court, under his window, asking familiarly if "The Wallah" was in his room.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

AN INTRODUCTION.

AFTER this Hanbury came down pretty often to the barracks, and was esteemed "a right good fellow." He brought his horse, he brought his guns—objects of absorbing interest to many beholders. They soon learnt how the gossips had given out the banns of marriage between him and one of the Manuels; and Young Brett, in his off-hand way, asked him about it openly.

"Well," said Mr. Hanbury, with an honest smile, "I am not at liberty to say much, you know, but I hope it is not very far off. Only I am afraid I am not born to be so lucky a fellow."

Then they all spoke in praise of their looks; they were "fine girls," but the youths lamented their exclusiveness, and the cruel way they kept themselves "so close." To whom Han-

bury, in his simplicity, assuring the soldiers that this was all a misconception, and that foreign manners and foreign ways were at the bottom of it, said that, for his part, he fancied they would be rather glad to know people.

On which encouragement they burst into genuine raptures. "Fine creatures!" "Such eyes!" And in their military argot gave high praise. "A stunner, by Jove!" "Clippers!" and with such rude admiration. One gentleman, after a long rumination, gathering up strength, as it were, added the epithet, "Spankers, by Jove!"

But Fermor's mortification—and, indeed, it did not seem worth while looking back to—rankled in his mind, and, with a curious weakness, he thought that if he could only get a fair opportunity of publicly "putting down" his enemy, his peace of mind would return. That none but gentlemen should be admitted into the army; that it soon would be "no place" for a man of refined feelings and good birth, was the substance of a meditation which passed through Captain Fermor's mind as he went out one evening, to lounge—scarcely to walk. It was summer, and it was fine, and though the roads were more green lanes than roads, especially where a hedge opened out in a sort of hawthorn window, and showed the sea far away glistening tranquilly, still never was the provincialism of the place so rank in his nostrils. He came past his favourite seat on the wall—forsworn now for some ten days—sat down on it, and fumed away afresh at the place and all its works. After half an hour or so, he heard voices, and three figures came past him very gaily, a gentleman and two ladies. "Natives!" he assumed them to be, not worth a thought beyond a pettish protest that even in these backwoods, whose merit, at least, should be privacy, it was hard (but quite in character) that a private gentleman could not get a moment to himself without intrusion.

These were, however, the two ladies of Raglan-terrace and Mr. Hanbury. The face of the elder and taller seemed to flash on his like the strong light of the sun, which had set but ten minutes: that of the younger, so soft, so rich in colour, with strange, full eyes, to absorb and draw him as he looked. It softened him as he looked. For the moment he forgot his grim Fakir creed of indifference. Besides the two faces, the third, genial and good as it was, seemed as of a low clown. The "low clown" called, "How d'ye do?" to him very healthily.

The three drifted by. Fermor thought how, after all, they must be "low," coarse people at least, when they could take up

with such——. But here was the low down but a few yards away, turning back irresolutely, and coming to him. Fermor's lip curled with hostility. Now was the time.

"I say," said Hanbury, "I must introduce you. It is really too absurd, this sort of thing. Come with me now!" And he took his arm in his.

To him, in a sort of haughty alarm and terror, Fermor replied, "Excuse me—really—I request——"

"Stuff!" said the other, looking back. "Don't you see? I have told them. It will appear so *rude*. You couldn't, I am sure——"

Fermor dropped from his wall, half impatient, half pleased—impatient of the *gaucherie* which this awkward fashion of introduction must bring about, pleased at this one more instance of universal homage.

"This is Captain Fermor," said Hanbury, taking him by the arm like a gendarme, "our friend that we have known so long, and yet haven't known. Ha, ha! Isn't it good?"

Fermor gave his calmest, saddest, Town bow, from long training exquisitely graduated to the suitable inflection of homage. Rustics might strive in vain after such manners. They walked on together. The elder girl spoke in a voice firm and musical. The younger girl shrank away shyly.

"Mr. Hanbury is right," the elder said, "somehow we *do* know you, and have talked of you very often."

Fermor smiled. He took out his humility mask (for he carried all his "properties" in his pocket), and said,—

"Time sadly misspent, I fear! What useful moments abused!"

(A good stroke, that would have filled the social pit and boxes on a crowded Town stair with wonder and delight.)

"Ah!" answered the elder girl, simply, "but we have so little to talk of here."

This was the result of the effect on *her*, and the captain looked at her suspiciously. But on the younger it had clearly produced the right Town effect, for she was looking up with a compounded feeling of half awe and half surprise—and, under the awe and surprise he could see admiration.

There is always a process of election. Even on meeting people but for ten minutes, there must be preference of some kind, even the most superficial. So Captain Fermor *chose* the younger girl on the spot, as being softer, and, above all, more *reverent*.

They walked together for half an hour, four in a line. Captain Fermor was the officiating minister of that little congregation. He preached the sermon—*they* listened devoutly. There were a few topics at which they had been looking through mere pastoral—or rather say provincial—glasses, and for which he now lent them his more worldly lorgnette. In a gentlemanly way he lifted his eyes and sneered mildly, yet not ill-naturedly, at what was about them. He worked the *ro eye* plentifully. He put his personality through all moods and tenses for them. Yet presently he began to see that his little arrows were shooting past the elder girl. He said, "They persecute me to know this person and that. I declare, if you were to know all I suffer, and the *tortures* I have to endure—But I don't want it. In Town, of course, there I lay myself out for it—*there* I get interest for my money. In fact, I am a different being altogether. But here I have been obliged to make a sort of rule. If you don't draw the line somewhere, you know—" When he had got so far, he found the eldest Miss Manuel was saying something in a low voice to John Hanbury,—

"An ill-bred person."

But there was a reverence in the large eyes of the softer girl which indemnified him. He remarked, too, with a sort of pleasure, how beside him on this occasion "that boor," as he christened him, seemed to sink down into a lower Yahoo sort of grade. He artfully kept the talk upon the higher social tablelands, where Hanbury could scarcely breathe, and he really contrived to be amusing—because half biographical—on the topic of Town parties and dinners, and some notable men whom he had met. Hanbury the honest, the admired, was almost reduced to silence. Fermor, too, had not forgotten the "outrage," as he considered it, on "that boor's" part, and several times when Mr. Hanbury struck in with some rough and hearty, and, perhaps, too universal a choir of praise, he quietly, and with the half superiority of pity, set him right.

The elder Miss Manuel did not seem to take so much interest in this exhibition. She presently broke in on the personal current of Captain Fermor's life—as he was giving them a sort of psychological analysis: "No one *quite* understands my mind," he said, with his agreeable smile, as if speaking of another person altogether. "Some think me proud, some say I am so indifferent; but neither of these classes know me really. It would take years of study to know me properly—one side of my character, even—and even then," &c. And it was just at this point,

not, however, rudely, that Miss Manuel struck in eagerly: "Well, about the Baron—do tell us. I am dying to hear."

This was an opening for John Hanbury to ride in on his great horse, which he did with a genuine ardour and enthusiasm. It was like the fresh air of daybreak after the candles and hot close vapours of a ball-room.

"To be sure," he said. "I know you will be all interested to hear of the Baron. He is gone for a little training—out every day on the downs. Had a letter to-night about him. Sure to carry all before him. There won't be such a horse in."

The two sisters looked eager: even the softer faced, who had stayed a few seconds behind with Fermor's psychology, was now busy with the Baron. "Nice, darling creature!" she said, with a sort of dreamy rumination; "and his dear, noble neck!"

"Good old fellow!" said John, taking a different view of him. "And he shall have the honour of carrying you the day before to give him spirit."

"Oh, how kind!" said she, the round eyes swimming in pleasure. "How I shall enjoy it! We *must* go and see him winning! Oh, Pauline! we *must*! Surely mamma would not mind just for once."

Thus was Captain Fermor and the analysis of his mind, left leagues behind. He had misgivings that, after all, these might prove "low" people too. But the true annoyance was the incurable lowness of "that boor." He *must* make an example of him. But the horse, now introduced, was hard to struggle against. Even the soft, the round-eyed devotee was drawn away. He said to her, in a low confidential voice, "You have been in Town, I am sure you have——"

But with an absent smile she answered him, "Oh yes!—that is, not for ages." Then to Hanbury, suddenly, "And when will he arrive, the noble, gentle thing? I am longing to see him again."

"On Monday," said Hanbury, with the same eagerness. "I saw him yesterday, his coat shining like a looking-glass—and such a stride. When I took him over a stiff fence, he cleared it like a furrow. Oh, he will do," said John Hanbury, rubbing his hands with delight.

The two girls' faces were turned to him with wonderful eagerness, that of the elder girl with a sort of pride in Hanbury himself, the younger with an interest that seemed to travel away to where the noble brute was in his paddock. For the moment no one in the company was taking thought of the refined Fermor. He smarted under it.

"This horse," he said, with bitterness, "seems to be about the most distinguished person of his time. Every one appears to be absorbed, to live, move, and have his—or *her*—being in him." And he gave a sort of smile athwart the two ladies. But John answered him with simplicity, quite pleased that he too was interested in the matter.

"I am," he said, "absurdly so. To tell you the truth, there are one or two nights that I have not slept for thinking of him. In fact, I have been foolish enough to put a good deal of money on him. You'll think me very absurd?"

Captain Fermor answered with exquisite satire, "Well, if you *have* so strong an opinion, I must not contradict you!" and he looked for the applause which the stroke must extort. The bright flashing face was cold and impassive, and turned towards him with steadiness; that of the younger was waiting shyly, with a half smile of curiosity, to hear more. Here was a good opening for a handsome exit off the stage. He made his bow. "Must ~~now~~," he said, "must really go now. Have to be home. So glad to have had the pleasure," &c.

John Hanbury wrung his hand awfully. "Don't you like them?" he whispered, as he walked away a few steps with him. "You saw how interested she was about the horse. The fact is, I have set my heart on winning this race. And with the race, *old boy*," he added, with a hearty and dreadful familiarity that made Fermor's blood curdle, "I shall win something else! I must tell you *I think it is all right*—you understand—the younger one. A sweet, sweet angel; my big, stupid heart is yearning for her. Don't tell any fellow, though. Good-bye."

Now as Captain Fermor lifted his hat to the two ladies, the idea before his mind had been that he had happily lowered their respect by a sort of contrast. "How they can put up with that boor's insufferable coarseness! It jars on me at every turn. And how *she* can! If she was dressed properly, and trained under good hands, she might do—in Town." And Captain Fermor thought of the soft liquid eyes, and that pleased expression of curiosity as he talked. "All to be thrown away on that low boor."

That low boor and the two ladies walked home together; but they were a little silent. "By the way, how do you like Fermor?" he said.

"He is very well," said the elder; "quite the common run of fine gentleman."

"But he seems to know the world so well," said the younger girl, timidly.

The other laughed. "How well you know the world, to tell us that, Violet! I should never ask to see him, and if Mr. Hanbury is wise, he will never inflict him on us again."

Mr. Hanbury looked mystified. "God bless me! why so?" he said; "would not that be rude?"

"Because we know him," she said, impatiently. "And there is nothing more to know of him; he is conceit all over, and of the most foolish sort."

"He is a little fine," said John, reflectively.

"If you take my advice," said Miss Manuel, meaningly, "for your sake as well as for ours, you will spare us his company."

"But won't he amuse us, Pauline?" said the younger sister, doubtfully. They were at their own door, and she went in first. The elder girl stayed behind a little with Mr. Hanbury. It was nearly dark. The stars were out, and down at the little port—far away below—the lighthouse newly lit was twinkling.

"Why did you do this?" she said to him. "He is a cold, heartless London creature. It makes me uncomfortable to be in his society. He says he wants amusement here, and who can tell *how* he may find amusement? You know you have called me the wise woman before now, and I tell you I can read character, *and he don't like you.*" So my dear honest John Hanbury, we will just leave him where he is."

John Hanbury went his way home that night thinking very deeply. He respected and admired Miss Manuel, so her words impressed him. "She sees things where I don't," he thought.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

A VISIT.

A WEEK after, Fermor and he met again, not very far from Raglan Villa. Hanbury was going away for a day, but was to be back again in the morning. "Were you going up to see the Manuels?" asked John Hanbury, bluntly.

"How abrupt you are!" said the other, smiling; "you quite affect the nerves. It would be a little too early, would it not?"

"I have just been there," said the other; "but am going

away now, to see about the horse, but shall be home to-morrow."

The first thought of Captain Fermor was, "What on earth does this fellow tell *me* his plans for? As if *I* cared whether he goes or returns to-morrow. The second was, that possibly there might be now a fair and open arena, happily secured from interruption—this boor thrusting his stupid presence so perseveringly on these ladies. The little "warm" face had been before him a good deal in the dull barrack room. He put on some elegant decoration, and, about five o'clock, sauntered up to Raglan-terrace.

He went in. There were in the drawing-room Mrs. Manuel, who "had been handsome," but was now "worn," and the younger daughter. It was the entry of a disguised prince into the villager's cabin. It was exactly the little stage he delighted in, and the audience he would have chosen. Mrs. Manuel was a woman of silent and depressed manners, a little shy, perhaps, from suffering of some sort. For him it was like a little circus in which his personality might go round and round. He thought to himself how—as a mere exercise for his faculties, now long rusted by disuse—he would show them the difference between true and trained refinement, and that dull common stuff they had had to bear with of late. He really exerted himself, sitting on a low chair, and from that, as from a little pulpit, gave out his monologue. He was entertaining. He aired all his properties. He took his mind, as it were, into his hand, and showed it round. "This is where I differ from other men. The common fellows that we meet in the drawing-rooms, they can speak, but can't talk. Now *I* can talk, but *I* can't speak. *I* wish *I* could. *I* envy those creatures—upon my word *I* do. *I* suppose if *I* laid my mind to it *I* could. If *I* chose to talk upon, say horses, *I* suppose *I* could ring the changes on horses as well as another—pasterns, curbs, and the rest of the jargon. But *I* don't want to. *I* ride a horse out in the open air, not in the house, you see!"

Two smiles on two faces—one, though, a little doubtful—welcomed this sally. Just then entered, as she always did, with a flash, the taller Miss Manuel. She looked at him with a sort of hostile inquiry.

It made one more for the audience, and Fermor, turning himself in his pulpit, went on: "Now there's your friend Mr. Hanbury. We know him so well, no better person breathing, but he has his line; and what *I* like him for, he feels it, and

don't try and travel out of it. Then he talks as we have heard him, about that horse of his, over and over again. It is very pleasant to hear it, because, you see, it is nature. Now you see, I can't manage that sort of thing. I suppose I know a horse as well, at least, as most men, and, perhaps, can ride one a great deal better than many; but then I can't put it in so dramatic a way—I can't indeed!" and Captain Fermor smiled pleasantly. He felt he was getting more fluent every moment. The soft devotional eyes were fixed on him.

Miss Manuel struck in. "I hope he will long keep that dramatic power, as you call it. I hope he will never exchange it for the false affectations of fashion. I don't see much good brought by them. I hope not—never!" She spoke this a little excitedly.

Captain Fermor shrugged his shoulders, and smiled at Violet. "You know your friend better than I do. I don't pretend to say how he will turn out. I can't lay my mind to *that* sort of study. I have no time—I wish I had."

Violet gave a little low laugh. She could not help it. It was a titter of approbation.

"His is a fine open manly character," said her sister, her face beginning to flush, "that *would* be worthy of all study. If he does talk of one subject, if he is proud of his horses, it is a manly English taste, and the taste of English gentlemen. Some of the best English lords are on the turf, are they not?—the most intellectual, and most cultivated. I can tell you it requires some courage to ride a steeple-chase."

She was walking up and down in this excited manner, working up gradually to something like anger. Her sister seemed to feel this, for she made a low protest: "Oh, Pauline!" The other stopped suddenly, and said,—

"Captain Fermor, pray are *you* going to ride in this race?"

He was smiling and twisting his hat between his knees, like a globe, two lavender fingers being the pivots. "Why, I believe not," he said. "Not but that I should like it. Some of our people will ride, which I am very glad of. It will give the rustics here a lesson. None of them know how, positively not one."

"But Captain Fermor, it seems, is *not* to give the lesson."

He coloured a little. "It doesn't follow——"

"We," she went on, "have all been brought up to admire these manly sports, even when there is risk and danger; we respect them, and we all hope *our* champion shall win. Don't you, Violet?"

While they were expecting the answer from Violet, the door opened, and John Hanbury stamped in. He stopped as he saw Captain Fermor. "Why," said he, "I thought you were——"

The other waited coldly for him to finish. "Yes?" he said.

"I say, I did not think you were coming up here."

"You have just arrived in time," said Miss Manuel. "Captain Fermor has been turning into ridicule some dangers he has reasons for not encountering himself—our English horses, and our races, and race-course, and the rustics, as he calls them, who are to ride, but don't know how."

John Hanbury, who had been reflective, and even moody, since he entered, now coloured a little.

"We shall have some of *your* friends in, shall we not? Well, the rustics shall try and show them what they can do."

"Oh, as for that, my good friend, you must recollect when a man has been a whole course of Goodwood, and the Derby, and Ascot, and a hundred such things, these local affairs must seem a *little* poor. Every allowance must be made."

"Why not try it?" said honest John Hanbury, with something really like a sneer. "Well, never mind. Wait for the day."

"Yes, wait for the day," said Miss Manuel. "*Our* horse shall win, and our champion. We have 'backed' him—is not that the word?—heavily."

The younger girl caught some of this enthusiasm. "Oh, yes! we *must* win."

"I shall win," said John Hanbury, looking at her with a sort of sulky pride, "or—or break my neck in a ditch. I shall deserve it."

"Don't speak in that way," said the two together. "Now do tell us about the Baron;" and both drew over with him towards the window, quite absorbed in him and the subject, and forgetful of other persons.

Captain Fermor, still twisting his hat on the little low chair, looked after them. "Second class people, after all," he said bitterly to himself. "Just, indeed, what I might have expected. This is what invariably comes from stepping down out of one's position." And rising, he prepared to take a formal leave. "I am sorry," he said, with calm sarcasm (afterwards it was balm to him to think with what Roman dignity he had departed), "I am sorry to interrupt, even for a moment, your discussion of this *interesting* subject," and, with his voice, he, as it were, put in italics the word interesting. But on the younger girl's face

there was a sort of gentle appeal, or beseeching protest, which he thought of afterwards. But he must give her a lesson. He went out sternly.

He was one of the most sensitive creatures in the world—laughably so, and he went away chafing. He would give anything, he thought, for a horse in this race, just to show them how calmly, and even elegantly, a true gentleman could ride in to victory, in the face of all dangers. He liked to map out for himself little schemes of polite vengeance, and make for himself gorgeous pictures of triumph; he victorious, boors beaten, shouts of joy. Then, *this* would be the retribution: when all were pressing forward to salute him, to cover *that* family with confusion by a calm overlooking—without pique, of course, which would be the way with vulgar, untrained people.

In that little assembly it was natural that the first topic should have been Fermor.

"There! I feel warmth again," said Miss Manuel, walking backwards and forwards. "I am glad he is gone. There is something so false and heartless about his manner!"

John Hanbury was silent for a moment. "I don't know, I suppose he has trained himself into *that* stiffness. I don't understand him."

"It is quite thrown away on us," said Miss Manuel. "We are simple creatures. All his attitudes and cold refinements are quite wasted here."

"What did he mean," said John Hanbury, "by his holy horror of our poor horses? I suspect our steeple-chase would be too rough and coarse a style of amusement for him."

But the younger girl, quite silent, made no criticism on the absent "fine" Captain Fermor. He soon passed out of their talk.

They knew very little of "fine" Captain Fermor, when they set him down as shy about horses. He was cramped in means, and could not support the charge of hunting horses. He thought it over with many a curl of the lip. The prospects of overwhelming foes, friends, "boors" and all, by a dashing victory, was very pleasing to feed on. But he presently dismissed it. "Ah! *she*," said he to himself, "saw the true metal!" And again he thought what an effect those large swimming, absorbing-like, two deep lustrous little eyes would produce on the proper stage—a London stage—if she were suitably drilled, as it were, and refitted, and brought out to see under the care of, say Lady Mantower. "To be thrown away on that boor!"

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

THE SISTERS.

THE house in Raglan-terrace, where the Manuels lived, though small, was as fresh as a rose; and though it could not display a plaster eagle, or an ice-pail of the same material—as some of its companions did—it seemed to be the least flaunting of the whole row. There was a little garden in front and another behind; and the grass and the walks did not suggest the idea of tufts of green cotton and dry sand glued on to a deal board, as the other pleasure-grounds did.

Their little drawing-rooms were fitted out with all the gaudy decorations and bits of clean showy finery usually constructed for houses made “to let.” The ceiling and paper were as white as ceiling or paper could be got for the money. The gilding of the moulding and looking-glasses were of a rich and strong yellow, and the radiating fire-place, having holiday during the summer, flashed back a distorted picture of the room, like the glass over its head. So with the knobs of the walnut chairs and the walnut headlands that projected from under the table-cloths, and the prominent portions of the rockery in the middle of the room (which was in reality an ottoman), all of which shone with little splashes of light, and were only now getting over their primeval stickiness.

The effect of this air of stiff luxury the Manuel family had unconsciously neutralised by the dispersion here and there of many tasteful articles of their own. They broke up the stern regimental ranks in which the furniture had been drawn up, and brought about a graceful orderly “no-order.” In a very short time the contract magnificence was happily overlaid and tempered, and the gloss rubbed away to the dimness of genteeler life.

A large lodger family next door, eight or nine strong in children (with a father in a white waistcoat with hands under his coat-tails, seen with an air of pride upon his door-steps during the evenings), looking from their plate-glass windows, began to know and take interest in the Manuel family: in the mother, whom they saw at times wandering listlessly in the garden; and in the two sisters, who went forth and came in from their walking. The nurses and heads of various sizes which were always permanently in the window, as if a procession were expected to go by every moment, made no account of the small-featured timid

mother; nor did the cold-eyed, rough-mannered son, who went in and out making the gate clatter behind him, excite their interest. But as the two sisters appeared, infantine cries were raised, and chubby fingers pointed.

Black was the dress of all the family. With the mother and son it seemed the stiff conventional mourning, ugly and appropriate; but with the sisters it became the flowing drapery of scarf and lace shawl, which fell about them in graceful folds. The figure of the elder, and her rich heavy hair, which she set off with a deep scarlet geranium, wrung toleration, if not admiration, from a London maid who was put away in a very high burrow next door; but the chubby fingers were pointed with far more favour at the younger girl.

She seemed to be almost a child like themselves, and whatever shadow of sorrow was in the house *must* have passed by her. They saw her tripping out after her sister, always a *little* late; and her voice supplied music for her walk, which was more a dance than a walk. She was shorter than her sister, and her face was small and round, and so bright that it seemed to be set in her airy bonnet, like a bouquet of soft-coloured flowers in a border. She was very young, and she seemed to have all the delicate bloom of the flower after which she was named. She was all softness, and tenderness, and love, and was made to sit the whole day in the warm sun of life; rather, those about her felt that she should be reared carefully in a sort of social hothouse, as a flower they might visit and watch carefully. In all the cold greys and browns of that mansion, she was a bright patch of colour. The cold didactic east winds, the blasts of reproof, and chilling precepts, "all for her good," were carefully kept away from her. She was not to know rough things, or she would fade, and the stalk wither and droop. Thus, with destruction and general break-up going on all about them, they stood close round her, in a circle, as it were, and affectionately prevented her from seeing. There was an amiable confederacy to this end. The brother was rough and sour; the mother querulous, with every nerve in her system shattered by sorrows; and the sister, impatient and impetuous, though full of strong affections. Yet the family smiled for her sake, talked lightly with aching hearts for her sake, and concealed all their scars and writhings for her sake. She was so pretty, so trusting, so full of little endearing ways, that dark rooms became lit up with a flash when she entered, and foreheads overcast with black clouds cleared suddenly.

And yet she was not one of the flighty grown-up children who at twenty still find life a toy-shop. She was what is called "steady," and took her share in the family duties.

The father in the white waistcoat, on his door step, thought the elder sister "a finer woman," but the current of infantine public opinion ran in favour of the younger girl. Stray skirmishers of the family, out under the command of the London nurse, had met her: she had spoken to them; and one day news was passed from burrow to burrow of the warren, that she had put back her tiny parasol, stooped over, and bent her bright face close to that of the then infants of the family. There were two uncouth boys, whose habitual occupation was hanging their heavy heads, and dealing with their fingers as if they were sticks of barley-sugar, but whose faces began to rage and glow awfully whenever her name was mentioned, as though a blister had been newly taken off their cheeks. The respective maids, who had early interchanged cards, talked the matter over; and through these channels authentic information trickled through the family, as it were down the stones of a weir. "She was like a child in the 'ouse," said the Manuels' Lady to her friend. "And we all looks on her as a child. The mother would mope herself away into her grave, only for 'er. Mr. Louis was a rough; uncivil kind of gentleman, "with no manners," but Miss Violet someway kept him in order. As for Miss Manuel, she was a fine stately creature to look at, "for all the world like 'a married woman"—as if that was the final type of fineness and stateliness—and was, in addition, like one of the famous unmarried "picturs at 'Ampton Court."

The details of their inner life, though greedily inquired after, were of course not so full and satisfactory. Thus they would have been glad to have had a sketch of the little night-piece in the drawing-room after Fermor's visit. The blinds had been pulled down, plate-glass was happily out of sight, and the lamp had been lighted. Mrs. Manuel was busy with some needle-work. The brother, a youth who had been fitted out with no profession, had shown a repugnance to entering the profession where his father had spent so much of his life, as it were down in a mine. He had no titular occupation, and went about "mooning;" protesting often against his hard fate in not having been put early to a profession, and at times was subject to curious fits of gloom, as though he had been deeply injured by his family. On this night he was at the table, busy with a pencil, absently sketching odd grotesque heads, and ladies with

veils and dogs. Miss Manuel had been at her piano, and her sister, in gayer spirits even than usual, had been getting up, and sitting down, and going out of the room to fetch something, until the constant rustle of her silk dress made the youth who was sketching impatient. "Do, Violet, please sit down, or stand up; fix on one thing or the other," he said.

The sister looked after her affectionately. "We must excuse her," she said, "I know what is in her head, and what she is thinking of."

Her mother, whose fingers were busily crossing a pair of steel weapons in carte and tierce, as though they were rapiers, looked over at her too. "When the two gentlemen were here to-day," she said, "Ah! I saw it too."

The young girl, who had been still getting up to search for many things, and falling unconsciously into innumerable graceful attitudes, stopped short, and looking away from them shyly, and with colour rising on her cheeks like a tide, said, by way of protest, "Such nonsense! I am sure I don't know what you all mean."

"Ah!" said her sister, greatly pleased, "I saw to-day what an impression you had made on him. His distress was almost amusing. He never took his eye off the other. He was in a most uncomfortable state all the time."

"Now, Pauline, such nonsense!" said the young girl, still in protest. "And I am sure I don't mind him—in the least."

The brother suddenly dropped his pencil, jumped up, and caught her by the wrists. "Do you believe *that*?" he said to the audience, and turning her round to the lamp. "Is that like blushing?"

He was the detective of the family, and in truth the tide was surging up violently in her round cheeks.

She shook herself free, with a pretty little pettishness. "When you are all looking at me so," she said, "it is very hard for one not to get red. He scarcely spoke a word to me."

"I wish he *did* talk a little more," said her brother. "For he is clever enough."

"Except when he gets upon horses," said her sister, "and then he is fluent."

"No, indeed," said Violet, in a low voice. "I think he hates the subject; for he said to me, that to be riding a horse round a drawing-room——"

There was an awful pause for a few seconds. The elder sister bent down her head in deep distress. "We have been

speaking of Hanbury," her brother said. "And who were *you* thinking of?" (Another pause.) "Upon my word we *do* make discoveries."

In the other faces there was something like pain and consternation. The eldest sister's foot beat impatiently on the ground. The brother sketched with fierce strokes, and put in vindictive shading. The young girl stood there at the bar, guilty and penitent, her face glowing like a sunset.

"So *this* is what is going on," said the brother. "This is what we are blushing for."

But her sister, who saw that she was in real trouble and sadly humiliated, hurried up to assist. "Stop, Louis," she said. "We are always teasing her, and I saw that you laid a trap for poor Violet."

The brother shook his head. "She would not have fallen into it, if she had not——"

A hasty rustle interrupted this sentence. Violet had fled to her room. The whole was of ridiculously small moment; but, somehow, it left a blank feeling among them, for they were all bound to Hanbury, and were his sworn and most affectionate allies. They were disappointed, and with a grotesque mixture of feeling, were half inclined to laugh and half inclined to despond. While she was away, they talked Captain Fermor over angrily.

"The very look of him," said Louis, "is enough. I never felt so inclined to quarrel with any man. As he passes in the street he almost sneers at you. The other day I could have turned back and struck him."

"I am afraid," said Pauline, hesitatingly, "he *has* cast his conceited eye upon Violet. He is so vain and empty, and so idle in this place."

"He had better not bring his idleness here," said her brother. "I suppose he would like nothing better than amusing himself in this house. If he comes here again, I'll insult him."

"Nonsense, Louis. You must not be violent. That sort of thing does not do in this age. No; the acquaintance is scarcely even begun, so we can drop it quietly, and without any fuss."

At tea-time Violet was obliged to come down and present herself, which she did with a pretty confusion, and a wish to hide her head in the ground—under the gay contract carpet, if *that* were possible—just as a foolish and pursued ostrich would do. Later, Captain Fermor was skilfully introduced, without

causing alarm, and depreciated with all the powers of his combined enemies. He was ridiculed, sacrificed in a hundred different ways. His sayings of the day were collected and set in a comic light. They were thinking how well contempt can kill, and went to bed that night convinced that they had happily succeeded in making him appear utterly contemptible in Miss Violet's eyes. For she was seen to laugh very often, especially when her brother sent round a very broad caricature of the wretched Fermor, very cleverly drawn.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE STEEPLE-CHASE.

THE National Eastport race was fixed for a certain Tuesday. Inland, some five miles away, there was a broad tract of rather shaggy country, ragged as a well-worn hair trunk, known, in short, to agricultural men as hopelessly "bad" land. But it did famously for a race-course.

Some of the military gentlemen, with a very skilful person, named "J. Madden, Esq.," who seemed to be generated specially a couple of days before every race, had been over the ground and laid it out pleasantly, with a judicious eye for difficulties and well-selected dangers. A hundred yards from the starting-place, there was a fine opening in the shape of a low fence, and a good fall or "drop" behind it; farther on, there was a quiet brook, which had often been fished for trout, but which the scientific eye of "J. Madden, Esq.," saw had wonderful capabilities, and, by a little divergence, could be included in the course. It was so timid and narrow that it offered only poor opportunity for accident; but it was arranged that half a dozen labourers should be set to work to widen it into a handsome and dangerous jump. Then the ground unhappily became smooth for a run of nearly three-quarters of a mile; but, finally, after three miles and a half of sound labour, by a chance that seemed almost providential, a hard and satisfactory stone wall presented itself, which looked as if it had been fashioned of cold iron blocks. It was considered that this fatal obstacle could not have been found at a more opportune place, as making a sort of handsome finish to the whole, and being sure, as "J. Madden,

Esq.," put it, to "thin off" a good many of those who had successfully got round so far.

The day before, the usual unclean miscellany poured in. The field began to spread such a cloud of dirty dun-coloured sails, that it seemed as if a fleet of shabby fishing-boats had somehow come in. The gipsies, the players, the menagerie keepers, the roulette gentry, all camped there for the night. The right of putting up a "stand" had, on the advice of Mr. Madden, been farmed out to a speculator, and some of the speculator's men were busy hammering together some terribly raw and rude planks, which might have been an enlarged flower-stand, or a gigantic gallows for carrying out the extreme penalty of the law. So open was it, and so put together with such an economy of the material, that it did seem to present nothing but a succession of "drops." On the night before, a miscellany of another order had poured into the little town, and filled and distended it to bursting. Betting men came from distant quarters, who contrived to make even poor affairs such as this bring profit; for money can be won and lost on such "events," as drops of rain running down a pane of glass. The betting men were so shaven, so collarless, so tight about the limbs, so partial to imitating a pipe with a single straw, and so generally flavoured with the noble animal who was their profession, that it was hard to distinguish them from other professors of the noble animal on the green, who came with a tent or a "Monster Pavilion," and whose evening existence was ushered in by a gold fillet and web fleshings. A kind of inn, or "public," with rooms as low as the cabin of a ship, received temporary rank as an hotel, and charged a guinea for a corner of a room whose walls were sadly bent.

The evening before, too, all the horses came, who seemed to be regarded with far more interest than the men who owned them, or the miscellany who were to bet on them, or the persons who were to ride them. As a train of them walked in procession through the place late at night, after the lamps had been lit, all closely swathed in their robes, and hooded and veiled, they seemed like brethren of a pious society who were about to inter a brother of their order. They were "coddled" almost like delicate children that had mammas to wrap them up against the night air. They had greaves on, like a Roman soldier, and some who had red edging to their clothing seemed to look out of red rings round their eyes, like clowns in a pantomime. But it was known that the square tall horse, that was a hand higher than the others, and stepped in a rude sturdy way, was indeed

"King Brian," the famous Irish horse, who had raced here and raced there, had beaten at Chester and Liverpool, and was to beat at other great Games. Small was his owner, and was to be his rider, and Small was to arrive that night—but very late. No one cared when particularly, since "Small's horse" itself was present. Mr. Hanbury's horse, "The Baron," had only a local reputation, so that the shaven, well-pumiced gentlemen who came from a distance did not make much account of him. He was, however, visited in a secret stable by mysterious admirers, for whom it was hoped he would win moneys, and who felt him over, and stood in a half-circle about him. Mr. Hanbury was to ride The Baron in person. The precautions which are taken on greater occasions were carried out in a mimic way, and a groom waited on him in his stable all night, who was popularly supposed never to have closed his eyes.

Still there was a strange belief abroad that King Brian would not run, after all. It was whispered, though no one knew who had whispered it, that Small, to whom "Small's horse" belonged, would not appear himself, which was a matter of small moment: but it was currently believed that "Small's horse" objected to any other rider, which was a matter of far more significance.

Mr. Madden dined with the military gentlemen that night, and prepared a good deal of punch. The admiring crowd listened with delight to his rambling periods, which flowed from his mouth lubricated as it were with oil. Over the fumes of his favourite liquor his face grew into a rich lake colour. His legends of his craft were abundant. Craftily and confidentially ladling out his punch into a wine-glass, he "put them up to a thing or two." He mantled into a profuse and boundless good nature.

Hanbury and Captain Fermor were both there, listening. Hanbury was delighted with this genial flow of counsel. The other thought him one of those "dreadful persons" so free of manners, whom it was a terrible trial for refined people to encounter. Mr. Madden, still fluent in speech, his punch, his lubricating oil, his smiles, which spread away in great coarse waves over his face, was not unmindful of his politics. At intervals between his ladling he was busy with his book. The children about noisily made bets with him. "He'll be scratched. I'm fearful of it," he kept saying, dismally, "I know Joe Small. He's been at his old tricks again." (The old tricks were tricks that led to the affliction called delirium tremens.) "If it's *that*," said Mr. Madden, lifting his wine-glass half way in the air, "there's about as much chance now as of *that*——"

And he engulphed the remainder of the sentence with the liquor. But still, with all these doubts and misgivings, "J. Madden, Esq.," good-naturedly "took" any offers that were laid against "Small's horse," just, as he said, to keep the thing going.

Just at midnight a despatch was brought in. He read it. "By Jove!" he said, striking the table, "was there ever anything like this? What did I tell ye? 'Tis from Cox," added he, looking at the envelope in a ruminative way. "Cox, you know, is Small's friend."

"Well?" said all the boys and men together.

"Well! He can't come. The old tricks, as I said. But Cox says, 'We must put some one on his back;' and, by the Lord, some one must be got," added Mr. Madden, rising in some excitement. "I tell ye, some one must be got!"

"Ah! but that's just it!" said Young Brett. "Such a wild brute as that!"

"Not he," said J. Madden, Esq. "There's a way with him. I know it, and his groom knows it. But is there a fellow among ye? By Jove! we must have some one. The horse *must* start. I tell you he must."

Hanbury had been drinking some of the punch—from curiosity—in a sort of pottering fiddling way. He was a little excited—with talking, and talking loud above the others, and with, perhaps, a very little of the punch.

"We are all of us booked," he said, "for something or other. We are all in to break our necks except——"

"Except Fermor there," said Thersites. "Hang it, man, why don't you side with somebody or with something? You never seem to me to do anything! Why don't you take a side?"

"For many reasons," said Fermor, sipping claret, "too long to enter on here. I have no horse to ride, nor do I want to ride a horse."

White-haired Young Brett laughed, a little foolishly. He, too, had relished that punch. "Hurt your leg, eh, Fermor? Ha! ha!"

John Hanbury, who had a laugh always as it were on a hair-trigger, could not restrain another burst. Fermor's lip began to curl. J. Madden, Esq., struck in suddenly. "Beg pardon," he said. "I know what's in a man or a horse. No case of hurt leg." Then, with great respect, "Seen you, Captain Fermor, I am sure, out with the Crowther hounds."

"Why, yes!" said Fermor, a little astonished.

"Recollect the day Lord Tiptree broke his leg? You and

three others in at the finish. How many miles was it—twenty-two?"

"Twenty-four," said Fermor, suddenly lifted out of his ice-pail. "How well you recollect! It wasn't the distance though, but the heavy country. Horse died of it after."

"Ah!" said the other, "no case of hurt legs there. By the Lord, sir, you are the man for Small's horse! I know your style as if I saw it yesterday. I saw you take the ditch and the heap of stones. Yours is the hand for him, sir. You'll sit him, sir, by——"

Mr. Madden had risen in his enthusiasm, and even pushed his tumbler into the middle of the table. The children's faces were all turned to Fermor. He sat with a calm but gratified smile, caught at the claret jug, and, with a gush, filled his glass leisurely. "I am very sorry," he said. "It is very tempting, but how can I? The time is so short—and——"

"Not a bit," said J. Madden, Esq.

"Pray allow me to finish," said Fermor, with great politeness; "and there are little matters about weight, dress, and the like. I am afraid it's wholly out of the question——"

John Hanbury laughed.

"Jove, I was afraid so all along," said Captain Thersites.

"But," said Fermor, slowly, and measuring him curiously, as though he were a preserved specimen in a jar, pushing back his chair and rising, "under the circumstances—and to prevent a disappointment—I should not be inclined to make difficulties."

"What? Ye mean you'll *ride*?" said J. Madden, Esq., with something like a shout.

"I suppose so—I think so—well, yes," said Fermor, deliberately. It was quite an opening for true unflushed gentlemanly bearing. "Come to me at six to-morrow morning, Mr. Madden. We'll go out and look at the ground. I don't promise, because there may be difficulties. I have a jacket of my own somewhere—I always ride in mauve. Mind, six. Good night, Mr. Hanbury. Good night, gentlemen."

Thersites looked after him with amazement.

"He'll do," said Mr. Madden, in delight. "By the Lord! he'll do—better than Small, I can tell you. Was there ever such luck!"

Honest John Hanbury, however, kept looking steadfastly at the door by which Fermor had passed out, as if he could not quite understand. Perhaps it had begun to strike him that this was to be something more than a mere race between two strong horses.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

THE RACE.

It was a bright and fresh day, and the sun coloured up the acres of faded hair trunks that spread over the race-ground, with such good effect that it really presented all the air of respectable and legitimate verdure. The crowd had poured out over those mangy downs; the whole fleet of sepia-coloured sails had spread itself on the horizon. The business and bustle were surprising. It was a soiled, tarnished, noisy, glib miscellany—one that was at work ceaselessly with arms and hand, and a very hoarse voice, making ceaseless invitation. A miscellany that declaimed noisily over carts of stone ginger-beer bottles, that cowered down over a three-legged stool, and conjured with a mysterious bridle and a skewer, that presided over pieces of coarse oil-cloth daubed with very raw colours and a very yellow Royal Crown, and a very rusted weathercock that moved round languidly. A miscellany that did a vast business in nuts at little shooting-targets, whose range was only three feet long; a miscellany, in short, that danced and contorted in dirty fleshings, that picked pockets, that sold cards, lit cigars, sang mournful comic songs, wore decayed old scarlet hunting coats, and swarmed in and out through the cars and carriages.

The large nurseryman's flower-stand was black with human flower-pots. Below the flower-stand was the enclosure, where every one was as busy as in a market—where there was a sort of enlarged rabbit-hutch, and where there was something that looked like a mammoth slate hoisted at the top of a pole. The human flowers, growing animated at times, came down here to market, and wore little yellow tickets in their hats, and pushed backwards and forwards, and talked hoarsely and loudly, and all together, to stray men upon horseback, who carried their hunting whips on their knees at an acute angle, much as the bronze mounted Louises do their truncheons. Beyond this was a plantation of carriages, carts, and cabs, all horseless, and put closely together like a gigantic barricade; and here, in a little chartered phaeton, were the Manuel girls, broken from their privacy, amused, delighted, and wondering exceedingly. Mrs. Manuel had sat in a vast stone amphitheatre, and had seen the wild plungings of the bull, and the gored horses, and the sand steeped in clotted blood, and stayed at home. This gentler spectacle seemed a little tame after that.

With them was their brother, a swarthy meditative youth. He was only twenty, but looked about him with a grave air of wisdom. In that little phaeton, however, reigned a certain flutter. There was to be battle and danger, which is the true basis of excitement, and a likely victory.

Some small skirmishing had been gone through—worthless contests between say two inglorious steeds, mere foils for the greater struggle fixed for one o'clock. Hanbury had come up to them, his face all one great flush. "Only an hour off," he said. "You never saw anything like The Baron this morning—as bright and glossy as silk—you could see yourself in his coat. He will do, I think," he added. "I have not seen King Brian, though. But I am not afraid of him."

The sun flashed upon the face of the eldest Miss Manuel. "And that smooth Captain Fermor! I hope he is here to see you win."

"Oh!" said Hanbury, ever so little embarrassed, "I didn't tell you, though—you haven't heard—it was settled last night—he is to ride King Brian."

"To ride King Brian!" said the two girls together, but in quite different keys.

"Why not?" said Hanbury, doubtfully. "And yet I am sure I don't quite understand it. And he will do it well—at least, I suppose so," he added.

"But you told us," said Violet, fluttering, "I think, that—that no one but his master could ride him—oh, it will be dangerous."

"Exactly," said he gloomily. "And they say it is great pluck to try it. But it now turns out that he is a great horseman, or something of the kind. I am sure I don't understand it."

A harsh and conspicuous bell, which had been born in the night, and rang every five minutes in a drunken disorderly way, now began again. "I must go," said Hanbury. "Saddling bell." If so, it had been about the twentieth saddling bell.

"Vanity," said Miss Manuel, excitedly, and looking at her sister. "More of that vanity! He is one mass of it. This is all contrived, to show us what an accomplished creature he is."

The younger girl cast down her eyes. "I am afraid," she said, "it will be a dreadful thing to see.—This wicked horse."

"And poor Hanbury," said her sister, reproachfully. "You let *him* go without a word of comfort or encouragement. I saw him looking at you. I should have given him one of those red geraniums. It would have comforted his heart and given

him courage. He will want every stimulant for what he has to go through. See, he is looking this way. We must call him back. Now I rely on you, Violet. Ah!"

It was not Hanbury, but Fermor passing them quite close—in a great-coat like a dressing-gown—calm, tranquil, as if going to a ball. He bowed to them in a sort of knightly fashion. Miss Manuel stamped on the bottom of the carriage with impatience, "He is coming to practise his skill on us," she thought. But with a pleasant smile he passed on.

Hanbury, a few yards away, had stopped doubtingly when he saw Fermor approaching; for he had all the wonderfully long sight of ardent and sensitive love. But when Fermor passed by so indifferently, and did not go near his treasure, his rude broad honest heart was struck. He thought of the other's calm courage, and skill, and training in society, and of his own natural bluntness, which had really reached to surliness; and one of his most genial smiles was spreading over his face. He was ashamed of his little petty jealousy. He was actually getting his hand ready to stretch out, when he saw Fermor turn back, and go up to the carriage. He had seen the younger girl detaching a flower from others which she had in her hand, while some dropped on the seat. Hanbury, colouring and watching with fierce weariness, then saw Captain Fermor putting a red flower in his button-hole. In reality he had helped himself, and was saying, "I must carry off one of these. Just going to ask you. Pray for the mauve jacket!" And so he retreated, smiling.

That was, however, the genuine saddling bell. For presently, out of some secret confine, bright gay-coloured figures, on horses as bright, began to defile among the human flower-pots in the enclosure—all so light, so airy, and striped over with streaks of yellows, and pinks, and all the gay colours, and seeming to be actually varnished like the toy figures in Noah's arks. Presently the flower-stand began to fill again, and to grow black, and to rustle and flutter, and the miscellany inside the paling, with the white tickets in their hats, to crowd round each gaudy figure with admiration. There was a buzz and a hum as John Hanbury, in pale blue silk, came along on his great horse—a mammoth steed, mahogany coloured, high, square, with a chest like a Torso, with a fierce eye, and his mouth strapped down to his waist. But so bright, and oiled, and curled, he looked as if he had stepped out of a boudoir. As he passed, his wake was marked by a glitter of little white note-books, and a fresh flutter of leaves. Approving eyes settled on him. When he got upon

the open ground he swooped away into a full bold stride, as even as a pendulum.

There was a little procession of the others—some small, some large, some long, some shy, and some wild; and each with a gay parti-coloured puppet on his back. Presently there was another hum. "Small's horse!"

A delicate Persian silk mauve jacket, grateful to the eye, and Fermor looking as light and small as a boy. His horse was an iron grey, close knit, with a heavy secret strength in his quarters, but a quiet unobtrusive beast, as if walking out to water. There was great admiration at this evidence of secret power. The sunlight glinted down, and brought out the rich tint of the rider's dress: the Manuels caught it some hundred yards away, and the second whispered to her sister, with something like a shy whisper of delight, "Look, oh, look, Pauline! There is Captain Fermor."

"How calmly he takes it!" said the other sister, scornfully. "All assumed. All acting!"

Mr. Madden, with a flag in his hand, was beside Fermor. "Steady is the word," he whispered. "Recollect, he will run away with you at the last mile—but let him. Then gather him up quietly—qui-etly, sir! He is in beautiful order."

Bell again! and start in some undiscovered corner. All the figures on the great flower-pôt-stand were swaying uneasily—steward in red coat cracking his whip excitedly to clear away last few stragglers. A roar and half-leap among the flower-pots. Thirteen little wooden figures out of a Noah's ark, a mile away, have been seen to shoot out, and are spreading like a fan.

There is a gentle rustle and agitation on the black flower-pot-stand, and every second hand holds a glass—but a thousand faces are all turned one way. A few Lilliputian horses may be seen far off, travelling very slow, and straggling, and have gone over a very tiny jump, as might be over a bit of card. But now the flower-pot-stand begins to be agitated: there is a crescendo hum swelling up into a roar, as from a thousand shells held to a thousand ears. The stand is giving spasmodic shouts, hoarsely, "Blue, by ——!" "No!—red—blue—red—yellow—blue again!—by—— he's down!—no, up—they're all over!"

They were, in fact, at the stone wall—what Mr. Madden had called the "beautiful stone wall"—and were growing into sight, coming on nearer, magnifying steadily. Great agitation and flutter in the phaetons, for they knew not what was doing.

But here was the stone wall. Up, down! up, down again! one after the other! Blue leading, coming into sight with a flash, and going over soft as velvet. Then a flash of red, then of yellow, then a roar of dismay from the stand, for two are down together. Roar! reverberation of shells growing louder, arms tossing, and a sound of hollow thudding on the ground, as if giants were having their carpets beaten. Every head turning with a flash, making an inclined plane of faces, every neck straining, every foot stamping, every hand clapping, and the train came thundering by, blue leading, then a streaked yellow—black, and then that mauve jacket, fifth or sixth, at a calm gallop, his stretches keeping time musically. This was but the first time round, and they have swooped away round the corner, and are gone.

They come round again. They grow out gradually, but have been thinned down to some seven or eight. A riderless horse, very wild, and with his own stirrups scourging his flanks, is going on with the rest. Blue comes to the fence, and is seen to look behind. Pink over the first. He has it. No. Yes. Blue next, "That's the man!" Then Mauve. "Yes," Mr. Madden shouts; "now let him go!" But he *has* gone. They are coming with a rush, and Mauve, calm as in a drawing-room, has glided ahead. The great gaunt horse is seen to be in distress, and Blue is using his whip. Flower-stand is one disordered roar of "Blue wins! Mauve has it—no—yes—no—yes!" and here is now the terrible wall at which they are rushing, as if they wanted to crash through it.

There are wise people who affect to know the great horse. He is waiting, and will go at a rush on the smooth ground. Here is the wall. Now! Crash! As they rise in the air, there is a dust of fallen stones; and Blue, darting out of the cloud like thunder, comes pounding in, the ground shaking, arms working "lifting" his horse. Pink second, half a dozen lengths behind; and Mauve——

Where was Mauve? Shouts of joy, victory, execrations, confusion, and a great rush down to the fatal wall. A mob was already gathered there before this one reached the wall. "Stand back!" Some who pushed well to the front got a good view, and helped to drag a shattered rider from under a shattered horse. "Killed—he must be killed!" No one can speak as to this for a few moments, until a surgeon, who is hurrying up, shall pronounce. Then we see what has been done. "Small's horse" is lying helpless on his side, with his great round eye

glazing fast, and his poor smashed flanks heaving faintly. But Mauve, his bright jacket torn, and soiled, and smeared, lies stiff and stark on a bank as if he were dead.

The doctor is presently feeling him all over. He must be bled at once. Other doctors, looking after the horse, pronounce it is all over with *him*, and that he must be shot on the spot. Others not so near, talked of it excitedly, straining their necks to get a view. "I took my place here on purpose. I saw it, by Jove! He rode over on him, as sure as I am standing here. I was as close as I am to you." Excited men from the top shelf of the flower-stand, with extra strong glasses, and opera-glass cases slung about them like canteens, came panting up. "He 'cannoned' him, didn't he? I'm sure he did! Who was close—who saw? He was winning, I'll swear!" But no one was so frantic as Mr. Madden. For the better enjoyment of what he had an instinct would take place at this stage, he had posted himself close to the stone wall, but in secure shelter. He was tossing his arms wildly. "I saw it all; the 'King' was coming beautifully to it." He was furious and savage, and threatened frightful penalties.

From the Manuel carriage had been seen an indistinct ruin of men and horses crumbling down together. The second girl had the opera-glass, the others were all excited and in a flurry with Hanbury's victory. "I knew he would win," said Miss Manuel; "did I not tell you?" But she noticed the frightened, restless way her sister was looking towards the stone wall.

"Pauline, some one is hurt. I am sure of it. Do you see the crowd? I am afraid that some one is killed. Oh! Louis! Louis! run and see what has happened."

Pauline turned suddenly and looked at her sharply; the other dropped her eyes.

The brother went away to fetch news. Just as he got up, a doctor was saying something about concussion, and giving directions for removal, with quiet, &c. "Stand back!" he had to say every instant; and a thoughtful crowd, pressing on him all the time, called out to others, "Stand back!"

The brother came back, but Mr. Hanbury did not. "Well?" the two sisters said together.

"He is hurt," said he, "and very seriously, I think."

Even the eldest Miss Manuel showed some eagerness, some agitation.

"Hurt?" No, it can't be. Go on. Tell us about it," she said.

But the second girl, a little flushed, was gathering up her black lace shawl about her in a restless fashion.

"He is quite insensible," he went on, "and no one seems to be able to say whether he is alive or dead. I didn't see a doctor there, and they don't appear to know what to do."

The younger girl had her hands clasped, and gave a cry. "Oh, let us go!" she said. "Don't let us leave him to those rough people."

"Go! No! no! What could *we* do?" said her sister, irresolutely. She was thinking how cold, how unjust, she had been to this poor steeple-chaser.

"Don't let us lose a second," said the other, opening the door herself and springing out. "He has no friends here—we might lend this carriage—we might be useful. Oh, come, come!" and, with a flush on her cheek, and a decision in her speech quite unusual, she took hold of her brother's arm, and they walked towards the group.

There was a sort of sporting doctor there, who was busy with professional exploring and appraisings. In the centre, with closed eyes, and a face as white, and dull, and close in texture as marble, lay the luckless Mauve rider. His wrist, which the doctor had been feeling, when let go, dropped upon the Mauve chest with a heavy inert sound. The brother felt his sister's arm tremble in his.

"If there were any house quite close, quite close," said the doctor (whose sleeves were turned over as if he were about to begin an operation at once), "or if a roomy open phaeton could be got that we could lay him in at length—" and he looked round.

A very crisp, neat-looking gentleman, seeming as if he were a clean cast from a mould—whose grey whiskers, if one took the liberty of touching them, would crackle as if made of wire—came up to the doctor and said: "Just the very thing! our carriage—not twenty yards off. Only too happy; shall have it brought up at once.—Beg your pardon, sir; pray excuse me." This he said with extraordinary courtesy to a poor racing Fool, in a battered cap and tarnished scarlet hunting-coat, and who, utterly bewildered by the civility, allowed him to pass.

"Very good," said the doctor, again looking round, "so far. But the barracks are out of the question—two miles away, and a broiling day like this."

John Hanbury, with hands clasped, and a face of the most abject despair and horror, was standing beside the Manuels, quite stupefied. He had hardly noticed them.

"Has he no friends close by?" said the doctor, "just to take him in for a few hours—some one in those houses there, eh?" and he nodded at an incomplete terrace close by.

John Hanbury woke up. "To be sure," he said, hurriedly; "the very thing! Won't you?" he said to the younger girl. "Oh, of course you will!"

She understood this ellipse at once. "Yes, yes," she said to him; "let him come."

"Come? Where?" said her sister.

"To our house. Yes, he must," said the younger girl, excitedly; "it is only humanity! You heard what the doctor said."

Her sister was overpowered by her eagerness.

"But——" she began.

"Thanks, thanks," said Hanbury; "here is the carriage." And the fresh crisp gentleman was pushing through the crowd. "Now, please."

"Gently, gently," said the doctor; and Fermor was raised softly, and carried as softly to a little open phaeton.

"My house is so far away, on the hill there—else really I should be delighted," said the crisp gentleman, shutting the door on the doctor. "Is it to be the barracks?"

"No, no," said the other; "we have got a place close by. What number did you say?"

"Oh! Four, Raglan-terrace," said Hanbury, distractedly.

"Go at a walk," said the doctor.

And, "Oh, go on quick!" said Violet.

The bell was ringing out harshly for saddling for the next race—little patches of bright colour were seen far off up at the stand—circulating in the ring. There was to be another race. The crowd had seen the best part of this show, and might be late for the other. A good many, however, remained beside this critical jump, as it was very likely there would be more falls and more accidents.

CHAPTER THE NINTH.

IN HOSPITAL.

THE charitable gentleman with the clean crisp whiskers, who had lent his phaeton for the insensible Fermor, was a Major Carter, who, with his son, had newly come to Eastport.

At the foot of his letters he wrote, "Yours sincerely, Henry Deane Carter;" his son signed himself "Somerset Carter," having received that name in compliment to a Lord Alfred Somerset, "the man who first took me by the hand," said his father very often and very gratefully; and father and son and Mrs. Carter had taken the first floor of one of the villas, on one of the terraces, and were come to live economically at Eastport.

Not that this was made profession of, or was even hinted at, by the small public of the place. There was a sort of little Prado down near the pier, where a band sometimes played, and where the men and women came and sauntered; and here the crisp major, so clean and dry and wiry, so brushed, so speckless, so canary-coloured in his gloves, and with little boots almost reflecting the company like small mirrors, first entered, as it were from the wings, upon the Eastport stage, and attracted the whole audience in pit and boxes.

He knew a few people already, and, leaning on the arm of the thoughtful boyish son, had put the canary glove into several hands. He had a pleasant gay face, fenced on each side by a little light shrubbery of crisp whisker. He was the most "youngish" man for his years, and had always a smile of eternal welcome upon his face: a face that seemed fitted up with snowy-white jalousies, like a foreign villa, which he threw open altogether when accosting a friend.

In a few days, by some mysterious process, he knew most people—most people, at least, that ought to be known. The people that ought to be known knew that he was a desirable addition to society. They told each other very often about Lord Alfred Somerset. The mention of that name was found as invigorating as Jesuit's bark to the languid system of the place. He was delightfully well bred, needed no social valet-de-place, but subsided without violence or exertion into general acquaintance. There are people who are thus never strangers in a strange country, but float into company and friends.

In that little corner the accident was a tremendous excitement. There was some noise and confusion on the course, in which Mr. Madden's frantic cries were to be distinguished; and from that hot racing society, which greased its hair, and swathed its neck in a yellow cloth, confining it with a glass pin, came loud charges of foul play—charges marked by loud execration. The stewards, indeed, held a sort of investigation on Mr. Madden's indignant requisition. There were many witnesses for Han-

bury, but the best witnesses of all were his own honest temper and open soul—familiar to all the riding men. He was fully cleared. His profound grief was a spectacle and excited sympathy.

Fermor was taken in slow and dismal procession to the house in Raglan-terrace. Some one had run on hurriedly to give notice. The parlour was hastily got ready. Mrs. Manuel, surprised and aghast at what was intended, made a sort of protest, but was frantically overborne by Hanbury. A crowd followed and hung about the place, telling the story with relish to inquisitive passers-by. Insensible still, Fermor was carried in, and Major Carter, who had the command of the whole party, and who gave orders with a skill and judgment and readiness of resource that evoked respect from all, was, almost as of course, admitted into the house as a sort of friend whom they had long known. So, too, was the doctor and that young white-haired ensign—also in sad distress about the friend he so revered.

Hanbury came in as they stood waiting in the drawing-room. "It is dreadful, isn't it?" he said. "I couldn't help it; before Heaven, I *couldn't*!" He glanced nervously at Violet, who, in a flutter of distress, was looking steadily away. "But the doctor says he thinks—he is sure, that is—it will be a trifling accident. It was, indeed, half his own fault," he added, piteously, as if asking for comfort.

"Yes, yes," said the elder girl, "I am sure it was. It was all unavoidable."

Her sister, who with eyes resolutely turned away, had been half panting all this while, now turned round suddenly, her cheeks colouring fast.

"His fault? Don't say that—you must not say that," she said, hurriedly. "His fault? No. I saw it all. I had the glass. No, you shouldn't say it, you can't say it, you know you can't!"

"Oh, Violet! Violet!" said her sister, reproachfully

As for John Hanbury, he stood gasping at her.

"I saw it all," continued the girl, with the same excitement. "I should not have said a word if there had not been an attempt to put it on—on—that poor creature—who is lying below, and who can't speak or deny anything."

Hanbury gave a groan. "I never said so—indeed I never meant to say so—only I admit it looked so ugly and so wicked in me."

The elder sister said, warmly, "No one thinks of such an idea, and as for Violet, I know *she* doesn't. We are all flurried. We don't know what we are doing."

Violet cast down her eyes; she was a little ashamed of her sudden outbreak.

The doctor was now seriously at work on the luckless Fermor. An express had been sent for a greater doctor, who might arrive by evening. The two girls fluttered about, half way up, half way down stairs, uneasy and excited, the second strangely so. Every one that passed up to fetch some aid or appliance, she seemed to search with a look of anxious questioning. Major Carter was invaluable. He gave confidence. Hanbury was of no more practical use than a child—was even in the way. The major was in the drawing-rooms, in the parlour—always pouring out liquid sentences in a low and steady voice; just as he was presently pouring out "drops" from a medicine-bottle. He had known something of that "fine young man below." He was Lady Laura Fermor's son—who had been, you know, Lady Laura Stonehewer—he had met the whole family at Nice, or Florence, or Aix-la-Chapelle, and they were charming people. "No danger, I can assure you. I make it as a particular request you will not be uneasy. I know something of the man below—very safe and steady—attended an old friend of mine, Sir James Macgregor: but when Cade comes down, in his hands he is quite safe. There is no man in whom I feel such confidence in any crisis of the kind. In any part of the world, I would telegraph for Cade."

In about three hours Cade arrived,—a thin, swarthy man, in a very high-collared frock-coat. He did not lose a second. He was in a hurry to see what business there was for him to do, but happily, by some fierce engines of the local doctor's, a little life and feeling had been brought into that poor beaten, battered figure. Mr. Cade turned back wet cloths, unswathed the head as if he were unrolling a mummy, pressed it firmly here and there, tapped it, looked at it reflectively with his own head a little to one side, as if he were admiring phrenological bearings. When he had done, he conferred with his professional brother, seemed to agree with him, and then, as of course, picked out Major Carter. It was thus, by a sort of fixed and eternal law, that Major Carter was to affect any one into whose presence he came.

Major Carter glided in with the issue paper in his hand. It was a prescription.

"Well?" they all said, together.

"Hush! hush! my dear madam," he said; "we must get this off first. There, now, Cade says he will do. No danger at present. I *knew* Cade was the man."

His listeners were so thankful, that they did not perceive this little encomium on Mr. Cade was scarcely just; for, unless he possessed the Royal Charm of healing by Touch, as yet his services had not gone beyond mere examination.

"And I think, my dear madam," continued Major Carter, "that by noon to-morrow we shall be able to get him away down to some quiet place." (He, too, had a sort of medical manner, solid and reassuring.) "I can quite feel how unpleasant it must be for you all, having this business going on here. But you know—common charity, my dear madam—common charity."

Mr. Cade was gone, having taken his confidential pecuniary farewell of John Hanbury. For these offices, to say the truth, he had looked towards Major Carter, as being the more prominent of the persons he had been in relation with, and had seen him retire with uneasiness. But John Hanbury performed the duty with even splendour.

CHAPTER THE TENTH.

A NIGHT-SCENE.

MRS. MANUEL, it has been said, made a sort of protest against the reception of Fermor. It was a very eager, earnest, and excited protest, quite out of her usual key, and it surprised even her own family. "It is so extraordinary!" she said, sadly; "one of *his* name, above all! It is so strange—so extraordinary! Any one but one of *that* name." And when Pauline, wondering, said to her, "Dear mamma, what do you mean? Surely we could not have turned him away from the doors?" she only repeated the same wondering and excited speech: "One of *his* name!—one of *that* name!"

This common danger and common excitement is a link of sympathy. By the close of this day they knew the white-haired boy-ensign, "Young Brett," perfectly. He showed a natural feeling that quite gained upon them, and though serving his poor friend had unconsciously brought about an introduction,

this idea scarcely came upon him. Major Carter was gone; but after dinner it was agreed between John Hanbury and Young Brett, both eager to do the whole duty, that each should relieve the other in watching, Hanbury taking one half of the night, Young Brett the other. Young Manuel, who, after the first sensation and earlier sympathy, had begun to look distrustfully on the whole affair, now that it had gone forth there was to be an early removal, affected a show of interest and even zeal.

The two girls sat in the drawing-room till late, trying to carry out a pretence of being busy with their ordinary labours. But so great a domestic tempest does not soon go down. The whirl confuses. With an agitation so recent, there is a sort of fascination, drawing all talk back to the one topic. They went over it again and again, with an ingenious variety. When recollection slackened, there was speculation for the future. But in all this the second girl took little part. She was no longer a demure Madonna, but had warmed up into a bright bit of colour. Presently she went away, and repaired to her own room; for it was now all but midnight, and full time to think of bed.

She heard them all go up, and stood a long time at the window looking out, with her hair down upon her shoulders. Below her, she could see a square bright patch of light upon the ground, which was thrown from the window of the room where Fermor was lying with a dull numbed brain, sore and half stupified. She could see the lights of the town twinkling far away down the hill, and these lights were in greater glory than on a common night; for there were revellers busy singing the Race, and the Horse that had won the Race, or drowning the sense of a sudden and fatal poverty. A few black figures would pass by troling, with a rather halting gait, and become bathed in the light from the parlour window. Then she sat down, looked long at the ground, and putting her hands on her forehead, over which fell her heavy hair, drew a long deep sigh of oppression, and shuddered. She was thinking of the day and its events, which seemed like a nightmare; and the shudder was for that horrid crash of men and horses and stone wall all mixed, which, though she had not seen, some one had described too graphically. Then she heard steps on the gravel, rose again softly, peeped out cautiously, and saw Young Brett lounging slowly to the gate. He looked up and down the road, for he was getting fatigued with his watching, and was wishing to be relieved. Then he lit a cigar.

Still in a flutter of anxiety, she stole out upon the stairs and listened. She was indignant with this "selfish boy" for leaving his post at so critical a season. Uncertain and anxious, she crept down softly, and stood in the little hall close to the parlour. The hall door was open, and she could see that the "selfish boy" had walked away. At that moment she heard a sound of tossing and a deep groan, with a sort of half cry. She did not hesitate a second; she had a good deal of Spanish leaven in her, and entered the room softly.

Poor ghastly Fermor, heavy, haggard, and revealed under the light of a waning candle, was writhing and twisting before her, with his arm drawn across his forehead. He was on the debatable ground between consciousness and dull lethargy. As he turned and writhed, he kept up a low groaning like an Irish keen. She did not stop or hesitate, as a correct, well-brought-up English girl might have done, but, full of grief and sympathy, went up to the bedside, spoke to him, and asked what she could do to soothe him.

His eyes settled on her with a dull stare, but she thought he did not know her, for he commenced his keen again. There was some cooling drink on the table close by, and she suddenly took it up, and held it to his lips. It seemed to do him good, and he took it gratefully—then began tossing his arms again, and groaning as if in deep suffering. Quite helpless, she sank on her knees beside the bed, and covered up her face. He will die—she was thinking. So brave, so gallant; above all, so calm, and so all but victorious, as he had shown himself on that day. He had suddenly changed: there was an indescribable interest and romance about him. All but victorious: except for that dark and suspicious collision, and that strange meaning look with which, just before the race, Hanbury had followed him. It was dreadful; and the half Spanish girl began to heave, and flutter, and grow agitated. "Oh, he will die! he will die!" she said aloud. "And what shall I do?"

Two figures were standing in the doorway, looking on with astonishment—one, at least, with admiration; for Violet's face seemed to glow softly through her hair, like a sunset seen through dark leaves.

"By Jove!" said one, under his breath. Hanbury, the other, gave a half groan; then suddenly caught his companion's arm, and led him softly out to the hall door again.

"What is all this for?" said Young Brett. "I say, what are you at?"

"Hush!" said Hanbury; "not a word."

She had heard their steps, as he had intended she should, and rising up softly, half scared at the peril of discovery, glided out as softly, and fluttered up-stairs. From the top she looked down to the hall door, where Hanbury, with a new-born interest in astronomy, was busy pointing out a star to his friend. "What an escape!" she thought. John Hanbury was not thinking of that star.

He did not speak for some moments; then, roused by the groans of his friend, he went in, gave him what was ordered, which presently soothed the patient into a profound sleep.

Early the next morning Fermor awoke better. He had got back to sense and intellect, and almost his first words to Young Brett were (spoken wearily): "I had such strange dreams last night, or nightmares, which? Tell me. Come, was there any one here last night—any girl—or nurse—a soft, beautiful creature?"

Young Brett, who had all the openness of a boy, and a boy's delight at a question to which he could give a full and satisfactory answer, and thus gather importance, said eagerly and ardently, "Oh I am so glad. Yes, to be sure there was! Such a surprise! When we came in last night about midnight there was the younger one——"

Fermor motioned languidly upwards.

"Exactly. One of the girls kneeling there, in such a state—crying, I think. She looked like an angel, hanging over you, by Jove! But, by Jove! I was not to talk to you. I am so glad, my dear old fellow! There, lie down."

The old complacent languor came on Fermor's white lips, and the affected smile, as who should say, "Even in this ruin and decay comes the old story! Go on," he said, languidly.

He would have liked all the particulars, just as he would be presently feeling a convalescent's appetite for a little chicken. But Young Brett, somewhat frightened at what he had done, would tell no more.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH.

A SPLENDID DEPARTURE.

WHEN the happy change was known, there was great joy in the house. Hanbury was silent and grateful. A weight was off his mind. The doctor came early, announcing that he could not have wished the patient to be doing one particle better—which seemed a grudging sort of limitation to favourable wishes. But there was now another trouble in Hanbury's breast.

It was found that "we could *scarcely* move him to-day, my dear madam—*scarcely*!" The doctor was playing the piano softly and nimbly on his lips with his fingers. "I don't know but that it would be risky, too risky; we might lose all we have gained. N—o—o," he continued, as if the minutes of a council held inside him somewhere had just been brought to him, and he had to give his casting voice, "I *don't* think it would do. I would not recommend it."

Mrs. Manuel had all a housewife's terror of a residence of many weeks; but, relieved from that apprehension, she rather liked the excitement. A couple of days more, and Fermor began to mend. Another day, and he was to be moved away to fresh, airy rooms, upon a hill, taken specially by Major Carter, who had proved himself through all the crisis one of the most collected, efficient men of business that could be conceived—so practical, so delicate, so friendly, and, above all, making his good offices silently felt. The Manuel family actually came to look on him as an old friend. Hanbury, as the danger receded into the distance, passed from deep gloom, and even despair, into spasmodic delight and thankfulness: but from this stage again sunk gradually into uneasy gloom and distrust. He came and went restlessly. He looked from face to face doubtfully. Since the night when Violet had been surprised at Fermor's bedside, she had recovered her old manner towards him; but this might have been to deprecate misconception, or even displeasure, and to secure silence. The sense of common danger had made such little misconception appear almost trifling. But now it began to be magnified—to Hanbury, at least—every hour.

It came to noon of the day of the removal, and a carriage—hired by Major Carter—waited at the door. The invalid—the dull, bruised, confused Fermor—had been gradually fading out,

like a dissolving view, and, in his place, were coming back the harder lines of the older sleepy-eyed officer who had dawdled into the saddle in the mauve jacket not many days before. In a fortnight he would be well, or convalescent, and lounging about in an invalid's demi-toilette. Now he looked pale and delicate—almost interesting, as it appeared to the maid-servants. ("Lovely," one thought him, who suffered much after his departure.) As he was lifting himself from the sofa, Hanbury came in, with distress and doubt again seen on his forehead.

"Oh," said he, "so you are going, and I *do* hope you will get quite well! I am sure I never shall forgive myself, and I know you will believe me when I say, solemnly and sincerely, and from my soul, that I never intended it—never! never!"

Fermor smiled his old smile for the first time since the accident. *It* had not been damaged.

"Good gracious!" he said, "who supposes it? Such an idea! It never even occurred to me."

"Thank you, thank you! I am so glad," said Hanbury, fervently. "I knew you would stand to me. And now, would you mind—but this is flurrying you, and we weren't to agitate you——"

"Were you not?" said Fermor, coldly. "We should have thought of that a little earlier—doesn't that strike you? But we may as well now finish, as you have got so far."

"I didn't mean—I did not, indeed. But oh, would you mind just saying it over again to *them*?"

"Saying what again, and to whom? Pray speak out, I really don't follow you."

"Why, you see," said the other, in fervent confidence, "it is most unfortunate—but she, that gentle second one, has taken up some notion that it was done on purpose, and it is *so* unfortunate that it looked ugly; but, upon my soul, as I stand here, and if I were to go to my grave to-morrow——"

"Really you are fatiguing yourself," said Fermor, wearily, "and fatiguing me. I have told you what I thought, already."

"Ah, true! yes!" said the other, a little vaguely, "so you did. But I want you, as you are going away, and may not see them again for long——"

Fermor smiled dubiously. "Not see them——"

"You would do me *such* a service by telling them so."

"What," said Fermor, smiling, "that I am going away?"

"No, but about the race. The fact is, we have gone much further than you suppose. It is virtually settled, or understood,

and but for this unfortunate idea—Indeed, if I could be capable of such an act, she is not to be blamed; so it is all quite natural, you see.”

“I see,” said Fermor, “I see; it would quite account for it. Very well. Would you help me down, please, for I am as weak as a child.”

He really was, and moved very slowly, step by step, on strong John Hanbury’s arm. He reached the landing quite spent, and sank down upon a sofa. Wine had to be fetched hastily for him; in fact, he had nearly fainted. The women were all full of sympathy. The maid who thought him “lovely” was looking on in private agony.

Nothing could be more effective than that pale face, so refined, so delicate in tone. His voice, too, was soft and gentle. It was an opening for a graceful retirement, and he knew how to make profit of it. There was a touch of pathos in the way he returned thanks for their kindness to him. He should not easily forget. He was not strong enough *now* to say all he was inclined to say, but he hoped they would understand him. At the same time, would they forgive him if he were to say they were a *little* bit responsible themselves for the infliction of his presence? for, if they recollected, Miss Manuel had all but challenged him to ride the race. Had she not, now?—and he would appeal to Miss Violet there.

A little flush came upon the second girl’s face, and her eyes stole over to the sister’s with a glance of reproach. The idea had, indeed, occurred before now to Miss Manuel with some remorse.

“I did not do so badly after all, you see,” he said, smiling; “and only for that stupid animal which our friend rode, should have done better.”

Violet here was compressing her lips and beating her foot on the floor.

“By the way,” he continued, “I had just time at the moment to see how he turned and lurched over on me. I saw *you* trying to keep him straight, Hanbury, but the strongest arms in England could not have kept that brute from having his way. Forgive me,” he added, gaily, “but you know I never was frantic about him.”

Hanbury looked round triumphant, and there was exuberant gratitude flooding his cheeks. Miss Manuel looked doubtful. The second girl turned away her eyes, then walked over to the window to look at the sea.

Major Carter now came bustling in, crisp and crackling. It was time to go. Would Captain Fermor take his arm? There. He had been up at Brown's-terrace. He had been putting the last few final touches to the new and airy lodgings.

Fermor, propped up on the friendly Carter's arm, faded gracefully from the room. Wistful eyes followed him. The maid whose peace of mind was hopelessly gone, took a last and long wistful gaze. Hanbury, brimming over, bounded down before him and about him with the exuberance of a mastiff. At the carriage door he gave Fermor a grip of gratitude.

"I shall never forget it, never!" he said. "It was noble—perfectly noble!"

And when the carriage drove away, he came bounding up again, for he was now fairly "rehabilitated;" perfectly cleared and made straight in his character.

Alas, how little he knew! It was, indeed, only the "rehabilitation" of Fermor. For that bit of chivalry and generous testimony to one who was scarcely a friend, had painted in a sort of exquisite "glory" round his head as he retired. It was about as unfortunate a calling of testimony into court as could be conceived.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH.

A CONVERSATION.

THE little watering-place was gliding into its season. Houses were in demand, and house-rents high. The natives looked on proudly, and said to each other that it was going to be "gay." Among the same class there was an instinct that Major Carter, so newly arrived, was to be accepted as a being from the fashionable immortals. Without effort he had come to know nearly all men and women. They were delighted with his talk, inlaid with fine glittering names, like a mosaic with bits of lapis lazuli. He stood by, a conversational pointsman, and skilfully turned the train of talk into aristocratic sidings.

What passed in Fermor's mind as he came slowly up the stairs into his new rooms at Brown's-terrace, was an impatient "This fellow will want to fasten an acquaintance on me!" and he thought, with the peevishness of sickness, what a penalty this was to pay for the few little offices he had received. He was laying out, with disgust, how, after a mess dinner, he should

insist on a receipt in full, and coldly "drop the fellow," when Carter, having got him to the sofa, said, in his gay way,—

"Now, good-bye! You shan't see me again for weeks, until you are well. Positively no. And even then—I don't know, I am not a visiting man. I like to know a few people, not a whole town, you know. By the way, *you* do not find this place——"

Fermor only raised his eyebrows.

"Ah! so I should think. You want the 'Junior,' and 'Brooks's,' and Lady Glastonbury's box. Of course this does well enough for the common set, for your friends up at the fort, and *that* sort of thing. I tell you, you will have to get away from us as quickly as you can."

This was like a censer swung before him, and he accepted the fumes very complacently. "Don't go yet," he said, graciously. "Please don't. Sit down—for a short time."

"Only for a moment, then," said Major Carter. "Though I recollect that Lady Gunning always said that those visits where one was in a hurry to go, turned out the longest visits after all."

"You knew the Gunnings?" said Fermor, with a little eagerness.

"Oh yes; used to meet them at Aix-la-Chapelle." And on that text being given out, the two together broke into a sort of hymn of reminiscence, recalling in alternate versicles many fashionable names. Fermor, so long in a convalescent jail, could now breathe a little fashionable fresh air. The visitor was very amusing; knew of, if he did not himself know, innumerable "men;" men of peace and men of war, and men of clubs, concerning whom he had newer and more recent news than Fermor could have; who though conscious of being made a little inferior by having to receive information, his zest for the details made him overlook the channel of this information. He was already rather inclined towards this Major Carter, but one little incident finally determined his inclination.

"By the way," said Major Carter to Fermor, turning back, "I am afraid, while you were sick, I took a serious responsibility on myself."

"How?" said Fermor, a little uneasily.

"Why," said he, "there was a telegram sent to your family at Nice, and——"

Fermor's cheeks began to colour faintly.

"Do you mean to say they ventured to do *that*? Bring them

all over here! Was there ever such conduct? The thing I was so guarded against. Good gracious!" And in real distress he half rose from his chair.

"I am very glad to hear you say so," said the other, soberly. "Don't disturb yourself now. I quite took that view, and ventured to interpret your wishes. That well-meaning, but not over-discreet person, the tall strong man with the horse, you know, was for telegraphing all over Europe, and for everybody, in a sort of frantic way. I saw there was no use reasoning with him, so I took charge of the message, put it in my pocket, never sent it, and—here it is."

"Thanks, thanks!" said Fermor, with more earnestness than he had exhibited for months.

"It is really a relief to my mind," said the other. "I was afraid I was taking too much on myself."

Then changing the subject, as if it were too trifling to be dwelt on further: "You won't be disturbed here. I took care to see about the neighbours. The house to the right is unlet, and the one on the other side belongs to an invalid, a girl in a consumption, with a grim old father—your landlord, by the way. I was quite scared when I saw him first. Good-bye! Good-bye, Captain Fermor!"

Fermor said good-bye with wonderful cordiality. He was pleased with his visitor's humble departure. "But if he had dared to 'Fermor' me, I had made up my mind to cut him from that moment." For this was one of the little tests and gauges of gentility. "I thought there was something of the gentleman about him. I generally pick out the right thing."

In stricter truth, the right thing had picked him out; but the invalid Fermor that night approved pleasantly of all the invalid Fermor had done. Specially did he revert to the graceful and dramatic fashion in which he had "backed" off the Manuel stage; then thought sweetly of the dark-eyed girl. A really charming creature; something so natural in the business. The whole little play seemed to him, as he lay back on his cushioned arm-chair, still with half-closed eyes, very sweet, and painted in warm soft clouds—everything about it, even the utter rout of that poor boor, with his horses and horse-talk. He was thinking, according to his favourite formula, how your true-bred gentleman always must win in the long run, when that honest Young Brett, who kept at his heels like a rough simple terrier, came in.

After a pause, Young Brett said, "I told them to bring up

Don. I thought you would like to have him, as he would be company for you. I got a house put up in the yard for him; you can see him from your bedroom window."

He was a "good fellow," this Young Brett, and it was not surprising that most people liked him. He was always doing some well-meant thing of this sort. Fermor thanked him languidly. "Very good of you, indeed. Glad to have the dog. Thanks!" He always said "thanks," not "thank you," as a more refined acknowledgment.

Fermor was fond of reveries and castle-building; such castle-building, at least, as in the grounds attached he could make out his own figure strolling, with a divine air about it, like a god dressed in human clothes. He made himself speak, and loved to hear his own voice, in a calm and quiet way, doing marvels. On this night he thought pleasantly of the day's work. His eye rested with pleasure on the half Spanish girl. Her devotion and personal worship, discovered so curiously, was most acceptable; he smiled as he thought of her. "*She* is a lady," he said aloud: "the only *lady* among them all," The rest, indeed, had long since been sorted off into "cads" and "low creatures." "Very odd," he continued, musing; "she is just the sort of character I had always laid out I should marry—that is, if I ever *were* to marry." And he smiled again, as he watched her walking pensively through his grounds, mournful, melancholy. Then, recruited by the little panorama, and really "fond" of the "poor child" (as he called her aloud), he went to bed.

He was fond of dogs in a negative fashion, and liked them for a sort of society. But this night his love for them was not strengthened; for about one o'clock he was awoken by the full barking of Don; who, though otherwise sensible, felt strange and uncomfortable in new quarters. Sleep was precious to Fermor; and, after an hour's impatient chafing, he got up and rang for his man. His man had been awakened also, and had long since been protesting in stronger language against the disturber. He went out as he was ordered, and beat the dog, which he was not ordered to do, then let him loose. In fact, it was but the dog's way of proclaiming that he was uncomfortable, and scarcely at home in the new tenement that had been hired for him.

About four in the morning he broke out again, and awoke Fermor once more, who, between his teeth, said aloud, "I'll have him shot at once;" a sentence which he later changed into "I'll give him away."

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH.

A FAMILY FERMENT.

AFTER Fermor had gone off the stage with such effect at Raglan-terrace, Violet fled to her room. But when she came down again later, in the half light—which, perhaps, she was waiting for—she found a silent and gloomy council sitting. The young girl, with sparkling eyes, looked from one to the other with a sort of triumph, as much as to say, “Is he not charming? And his generous declaration going out, all to clear John Hanbury!” But they said nothing, and her brother walked over to the window.

“Well,” she said, a little embarrassed, “so he has gone after all! How curious a thing it has been altogether—his coming, and his being brought to our house!” And again she waited for the talk to be taken up with sympathy.

“I wonder,” said her brother, turning round suddenly, “how you mean all this to end? How are you behaving to John Hanbury?”

“To John Hanbury?”

“Yes, dear,” said her sister, with a sort of “humouring,” coaxing manner, “you know we must think of him. Louis is right, indeed, and I am not sorry we have got rid of our sick man.”

“Sick man,” said her brother, sorrowfully, “sick actor, if you like. *He* knows how to do the thing with effect. He is eaten up with vanity. I saw what he was at the whole time.”

Violet looked at them both wistfully. Her lip was trembling.

“No, no,” she said, “he was *really* ill; he *really* suffered. The doctor said so, and they all said so.”

“That may be,” said her brother. “But, my good child, it is time that we should try and grow sensible, and steady, and leave off our romances.”

“Yes, dear,” said Mrs. Manuel, “listen to Louis.”

“Here you are fully committed to Hanbury, and as good and honest a fellow as you could pick out of the world. I have told him so. You have told him so yourself.”

“No, indeed, no!” said the girl eagerly; “he was to wait—to wait as long as I pleased; and as I might change my mind, he said, he would not hurry me. He is very good, and noble, and amiable, and I should not like to hurt his feelings, indeed I should not; but——”

"What!" said the brother, turning on her gravely. "Do you mean to tell us you *have* changed your mind, after leading this man on for nearly a year to believe you liked him, and giving him what amounts to a consent—and that you are going to go back, all for a childish whim of this sort! Oh, I couldn't believe it! Ah, Violet, I am astonished at you! You think a good and faithful heart can be picked up like any pebble on the roadside. If you throw it away, you have only to look for another."

The voice of Mrs. Manuel was now heard.

"Hush! Don't, now! Violet has been foolish, but she sees her foolishness. She is very young; she has much to learn. She will do better in future."

"Will she?" said the young man; "I don't think so. At this very moment she is thinking of that empty-headed, conceited fellow that went off so theatrically. A vain English fop! I know the man thoroughly."

"No, no, Louis," said her mother, anxiously, "she never said so. She does not dream of it."

"Of course not," said her sister, gaily. "We are only frightening the poor child with our lectures."

"I never said so," said Violet, a little piteously. "I am sure I respect and like him, and always did; only I don't want to be hurried on so dreadfully."

"No, of course not," said her mother; "why should you, darling? We were only alarmed about that captain, who is so full of himself."

"I'm sure she has too much sense," said her brother, "and I *knew* she had. I only wanted to be on the safe side. But we have got him safe out of the house; and I shall take good care we shan't have that languid mass of affectation here again, doing his antics day and night."

Violet spoke with a forced calm: "But why do you fix that friend of yours on me? I have never sought him. It is you—it is he—that—has pursued me——"

"Never sought him!" said the youth. "No—not since you met this other man. But before then how did you behave? Did you speak to him—walk with him? Did you ride his horses? Did you encourage him?"

"Why do you speak to me in this cruel way?" she said, rising up in growing excitement. "Ah! I see none of you understand me—not one! Let me go to my room," said Violet. "I have no one to help me—no one to pity me here—and——"

The anxious mother, more observant than the others, saw hysterical signs, and interposed. She ran to her.

"There! we shall say no more about it. Hush, dears! We shall not see him again for a long time, and be gradually rid of him. Go and lie down, dear; you look heated, and we will talk no more about it."

"But she must promise!" said her brother, who was as excited as she was. "She must promise me before she goes."

Her face glowed, and she fell again into her supplicating manner. It was as though she were helpless among them all, and begging pity. "I shall not. I can't—indeed I can't!" she said. Then she suddenly burst out into floods of hysterical tears. "This is very cruel of you! What have I done? How can you go on so to me? But I am stronger and wiser than you think, even if you all join against me."

Her mother came over, in alarm, to soothe her. She sobbed upon the sofa. The sister and brother looked on from a distance a little disturbed. Louis then broke out impatiently—"Such childishness, such folly. Viola all over." He could not contain himself to see a brave, noble, honest fellow, who could make her happy, treated in this way. Which was all apologetic, for the discussion was virtually at an end, and she presently rose, and, with a start, fled away to her room. The others looked at each other with doubt and alarm. She was the excitable one of the house, and had to be humoured and petted. Now they were in confusion, and looked at each other guiltily. The son was troubled: she was, in fact, loved by them all, and was their human toy. These chidings were all for "her own good;" so, at least, they always apologised to their own hearts; but when she showed signs of this sort of distress, she had them at her mercy, and did what she pleased.

In a few seconds, her sister had flown upstairs after her, had found her on the bed with her face pressed against a very wet pillow, and in an instant was kissing her. The other did not push her away, but only sobbed bitterly.

"Hush, hush!" said Pauline gently; "you are not to go on this way—you will get ill again. There, we won't worry you any more. We did not mean it, indeed we did not. We were only sorry for *him*, you know. But we won't talk of it."

The brother, a little repentant also, had stolen up, and was listening. Presently he was heard tapping. The younger girl was quite softened at these advances; she was even forward, in faintly owning that she was wrong, that she did not mean any-

thing, and that she had headaches. In short, there were mutual concessions, and it was all "made up."

That night, Hanbury came in, joyous and rubbing his hands together. He was very happy. He knew that now the clouds had passed over. The sad impediment was now happily transported away. His own fame had been cleared, and he was almost boisterous.

All the family came down to him. Viola bathed her eyes, and, possibly a little ashamed of her late outburst, came in with smiles, and even affected good humour. There was an effort in all the members of the family, as if they were anxious to get rid of the recollection, and Mr Hanbury went away that night late, singing softly to himself in placid contentment, convinced that he never had been so firmly established in the affections of her he loved.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

WHEN Fermor had just done a very light breakfast, which he took in a sort of "gleaming" fashion, his man came in to say there was a gentleman below who wished to see him.

"Who is he, and what is his business?" said Fermor, with the polite haughtiness he always adopted towards servants.

"Doctor Carlay, sir, he calls himself, and I think he's from next door."

"I won't see him, I really can't see him," said Fermor, pettishly, and dropping the aristocrat manner of a sudden. "How I am persecuted!" His tone was as of one who could have wept over himself. "I want no doctors, I have one of my own; send him away, please."

"Please, sir, I don't think he's come about *that*—I think it's about the dog."

"What a persecution!" said Fermor. "How can I help it? Make him go. How I am worried!"

Three firm, steady knocks were heard at the door, which was then opened gently, and a man's figure was in the entrance. The servant went over to prevent his entrance, but he kept his hand on the handle of the door, and bowed a sort of firm protest.

He was a very singular-looking person, more than six feet high, and so hard in texture, rough in corners and projections, and generally impenetrable, that he suggested the idea of being cast iron all over. He was stiff and unbending as that metal, and, where he had any hair, it was all roughened into a sort of grey wiry grizzle. Fermor looked at him with surprise. But he had no effect upon the servant, who was accustomed to strange characters; and he was presently described below stairs as "a queer customer."

"I have taken a liberty, a very great liberty, I am afraid," he said, in tones which were gentle—certainly gentlemanlike—and not what might be expected from a grim casting, "to break in on you without ceremony. It is only the necessity of the case that must excuse me. Your dog last night——"

"Oh, I know that," said Fermor, still pettishly; "he disturbed me, too, as well as you. It was no fault of mine. You know I could not divine it beforehand."

The other began to grow yet more grim.

"I don't speak for myself. It would be very hard to awake me. And if I was awakened, it would not make much matter. But I must ask you to have the dog sent away—and, really, without discussion."

There was a hard churlishness about the way this was put which was offensive. Fermor coloured, and hurriedly got into his most chilling outside coat.

"If you had waited, sir," he said, "you would have heard that the dog *was* to be sent away on this very day. There is no necessity for insisting, or any allusion to such things. What did I tell you this morning, Bates, about the dog?"

"He is gone, sir. He was at the barracks an hour ago."

This little stroke brought back all Fermor's good humour.

"I am glad to hear it," said the other, not in the least more softly. "I mistook, it seems. Sometimes, you know, you meet men who object to do things, simply because they are required to do them. Some of your profession *have* that way. You will recollect, I had never spoken to you before."

"Well, curious to say, I always know a gentleman," said Fermor, "by a sort of instinct." He was in excellent vein, he thought, that morning.

"I am detaining you," said the other, not in the least conscious of the thrust. "I must again apologise for disturbing you. I might have written, but writing is not nearly so much to the point as speaking. Writing only leads to more writing."

It was only the necessity of the ease and comfort of one whom I care for more than I would for a dozen like myself, that could force me in upon the world in this way. In fact," he added, coming back a little, "it is only fair to let you know that if I had heard your dog last night, and he could not have been got to remain quiet, I should have quieted him at once. Between human welfare and canine life, you know, I could not hesitate. Good morning!"

And with this he passed out and shut the door.

Fermor looked after him, indignant, fuming, yet mystified. "Such manners, such free and easy airs! Like every one in this place!" He tossed impatiently in his chair. He then called to his servant. "Bates! never let that—person in again."

He was mending a good deal. He was better to-day than he had been yesterday, and looking in the glass, among his brushes heavy as ivory mallets, and his silver-topped bottles, he was struck by what he called the "half delicate, half spiritual" tone his face had assumed. He looked down at his fingers, and rejoiced in their mother-of-pearl tinge. Now he was ready to "see" people. Some of the "fellows" would be sure to come boring him with their dull talk, and now they had him helpless and at their mercy. But they did not come, and he sat there fretting because they were *sure* to come, and because, at the same time, they did *not* come. Captain Fermor was, however, not what is called popular with his fellows. He was indignant at this desertion, and over and over again pronounced them a "low, selfish set."

Young Brett, however, faithful as a terrier, appeared about noon, and Fermor, a little grateful for this attention, was almost inclined to pass a short statute excepting him from the penal clauses of general "lowness" and "cadship." Young Brett had not much to say, yet, somehow, was company. He had no flow of talk, and yet people—notably "fellows"—looked kindly towards him. Later, on his way out to India, he had gone in and out of a poor stranger officer's cabin, had cheered him with a word or two and a scrap of ship news, had read him a newspaper, but all without any effort or show. The other passengers made a showy visit now and again, but found the thing a nuisance. Young Brett's honest, sympathising face was worth all the drugs the ship's doctor ordered. The sick passenger's eyes lighted as he filled up the little cabin door. By-and-by the sick officer died, and was cast over the side. Long after, when Young Brett had forgotten the voyage, he received a letter

from a famous London gunmaker, asking for directions as to the make of a gun he was busy with for him. The other said there must be a mistake; which brought out, that the sick officer had added a postscript to the last letter he ever wrote, begging his people at home to send Young Brett a gun—and as handsome a gun as money could purchase—in token of how he esteemed his kindness during that last voyage.

He was now looking out of the back window of Fermor's lodgings, on the row of gardens, which were large, and pretty, and grassy. It was a fine sunny day. "Jove!" he said, "should like so to roll oneself in the grass—lie there all day, you know, and smoke cigar after cigar. You ought to go out yourself. Yes, by Jove!" he added, as if lighting on a sudden discovery, "the very thing!"

"And lie on the grass," said Fermor, "all day? No, no. That is not the life I should like."

"Well, I mean for a time, you know; the fresh air would set you up. 'Jove!' he added—this was his favourite heathen god, whom he appealed to constantly—"there's some one in the next garden now. Come and look, Fermor. Did you ever see such a grim old 'buffer?' He's as stiff as a musket."

"Yes," said Fermor, calmly, above all curiosity, "I know him. He came bursting in on me this morning; something about that dog you brought here."

"And I suppose you shut him up. A very awkward customer though."

"Why, yes," said Fermor, placidly; "I think he did not take much by his visit. I have a way of my own for that class of people."

"Ah!" said Young Brett, with admiration; "that's it; just what I envy so in you. 'Jove!' he said again; "look here. They're coming with a sort of procession, I declare. A girl, and an old fellow, and a maid—and a chair." Then, after a pause, a long deep-drawn "By——Jove!"

Fermor looked out, succumbing to curiosity. There was a sort of little progress—a girl leaning on the grim figure—maid, pillows, chair, just as Young Brett had described. The sun was very strong and sultry, and not a breath of air abroad. The chair was set down full in the sun, and the young lady assisted into it, but sat with her back to the houses. The maid then opened her parasol for her. The grim figure stood over her, talking as grimly; at times walked away on a sort of, beat with stiff iron motions, and came back.

"Why don't she turn round and let us see her face?" said Young Brett, impatiently. "I wonder who she is! I am sure she's pretty."

"She is the girl," said Fermor, with an air of knowledge. "I know it all. It was about her he came in."

"I thought it was about a dog," said Brett.

"Well, it might be. One don't necessarily exclude the other. Hush! I declare Did you see her then?"

She had looked slowly round while her father was away on his beat. They both saw her. A soft English face, full of goodness, and of the beauty of gentleness and good humour. But there were traces of sickness and delicacy.

"Jove!" said Young Brett, "she is one! You are always in luck, Fermor. You always tumble on your feet in these sort of things. Lucky fellow!" he added, with jocularly. "Don't tell me, you knew of this all the time, and picked out the very house. Ah!"

This sort of freedom, and on this class of subject, always made Fermor shiver. He said, coldly, "You took the lodgings yourself—you or that Major Carter—I forget which I neither care nor know who are my neighbours."

"Nonsense! What nice work will be going on! Telegraphing, eh?"

Fermor coloured. Rallying confused him. "I don't understand you," he said. "I never do understand that sort of thing. Pray don't talk in that way. I don't like it."

The other coloured in his turn. "I didn't mean, Fermor——" he said. "I beg your pardon."

"No, no," said Fermor, soothed by this humility, "there are fellows with whom that sort of thing goes down. I don't care for it. It may be a defect; but I don't."

"I saw the Manuels this morning," said Young Brett, abruptly. "Ah! the second is a nice one. I am beginning to suspect our friend is really getting her."

"But is he, though?" said Fermor, contemptuously, and yet a little nervously. "Is he quite sure?"

"Well, I met him this morning, with a mouth open from ear to ear, and he squeezed my hand as if it were in a vice, and when I asked when he was going away, he looked knowing, and said it depended. But I must be off myself; promised to go with Page and look at a horse."

"What a hurry you are always in!" said Fermor. "Surely you are not quite a Secretary of State, or Governor-General of

India, or a Member of Parliament—or is this horse affair matter of life and death, that you can't afford to be a moment late. Will the horse die, if you are not precisely punctual?"

"Oh, no," said poor Brett, sitting down ruefully under this shower of sarcasm. "Not at all, just as long as you please."

"Well, is there no news? Surely there must be something going on?"

"No; nothing that I know. Every day is much the same with us, you know."

"You should read Mrs. Barbauld's little story of 'Eyes and No Eyes.' If you don't use such faculties as you have, you will become quite dull. Did the Manuels tell you nothing? By the way, which of them did you see?"

"The second one. She was in the front garden, and the gate was locked, and I spoke to her over the rails; and when I told her I was going to see you, by Jove!—But you will be angry if I tell you."

"Not at all," said Fermor, good-naturedly. "Tell it your own way. Go on. Well?"

"Well, I assure you she had a bunch of scarlet geraniums in her hand, and I could not tell which was the reddest."

"Which? of the geraniums?"

"No; the geraniums or her cheeks. I'm afraid, old fellow, you have been doing mischief there; I am, indeed."

Fermor passed over the "old fellow" with wonderful good nature. He shook his head with great good humour, and said it was nonsense.

"And yet," said Young Brett, thoughtfully, "what deep ones they are!"

"Who?" said Fermor.

"Oh, women—girls!" said the beardless Rochefoucauld. "That night when I caught her—Well, any fellow would have thought it was a desperate case, and yet, you see—"

Fermor suddenly became cold. "I don't follow you," he said.

"I mean," said Little Brett, "it turns out that all the while she is to marry that fellow. Any fellow would be taken in, you know."

"I can't keep up with you at all," said Fermor. "Your partiality for that word is quite confusing. Have you heard anything since? What do the precious gossips you go among say?"

"Well, Showers says——"

"Oh, Showers!" said Fermor, with contempt. (Showers was Thersites.) "Is he to be quoted next?"

"I don't know," said the other. "He picks up whatever is going on, and he says they have settled it all, and that you——"

"I!" said Fermor, colouring. "Do you mean to say they have been daring to mix *my* name up in the business? I hope you have not been——I am sure you have——"

"No, no," said the other, in great alarm. "It was only one night that Showers was talking in his impudent way about you, and saying you went after every girl, making people think they were dying for you, and I got angry, and—and——"

"And told what you saw that night," said Fermor, very hot and excited. "Just what I would expect. It was a great liberty. You had no business to do it. *Such* a thing!" And he began walking up and down the room.

"I never meant, I am sure——" said Little Brett, penitently.

"And how did he and those people take it? You may tell it all now."

"Well, they laughed," said the other, with great eagerness and candour, as a kind of atonement, "in a sort of way, you know. And Showers said he didn't believe it, that it was all brag, and that you were always in some 'sickly dream' or other, and that he had it from Hanbury himself, on that very morning, that it was all settled."

Fermor groaned once more. This, again, was like being plunged into the sea on a December morning.

Little Brett, somewhat scared, left him still pacing up and down, and in great distress. He was morally shivering every time he thought of that odious Thersites Showers and his coarse jesting, and of the loud chorus laugh of the rest. Above all, his emphasis rested on "that *stupid* Brett." "But what could be expected," he said, with all scorn and pity, "from such a set? Not a gentleman among them. even their names—Thrupp, Slack! I should like to give them a lesson—to take them down a bit. I should like to show their mean natures how little they know about the matter." And with many bitter similes he seemed to be laying out some very satisfactory schemes which would confound them all, and lay them grovelling at his feet.

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH.

A CONVALESCENT VISITOR.

HE was now very indignant with the Manuel family, who had neglected him. The son came once only, and he had merely called at the door. Not that he desired his society; for he considered him a sort of "low," brusque, ill-mannered foreigner, who, it was plain, had never been with gentlemen. He (Fermor) could tell in a second whether he was "the real thing" or no. Clearly a fellow out of an orchestra. And this notion, which seemed to him something in the style of M. About, appeared a very happy illustration. "A low fellow out of an orchestra!" There was only the one lady in the family—and the more he thought of that little night incident, the more soft and agreeable it seemed. He thought of her as a "poor" faithful little worshipper. She was very pretty, and he thought that, as soon as he got well, how he should reward her. If he had heard any one talk of "rewarding a girl" by a visit, he would have called him a low, ungentlemanly creature, even if he were talking aloud with no one present, he would not have used such a form of words; but still the idea, as a sort of motive for his resolution, was present to him.

His health was mending rapidly. The fresh air of the place was serviceable; the improvement could be marked day by day. He had been down to his barracks, in a few days more he was to resume duty.

He dressed himself with care, looked in the mirror over the chimney-piece; and thought there was a refined "spiritual" tone—a gentle air of weakness—which would contrast well with the coarse robustness and gross health of some of his fellows. Going to a box of gloves, he chose out a pair—faintly coloured too, as with a blush—so as to be in keeping.

It was about five o'clock in the evening, and he sauntered straight to the house of the Manuels. The maid who had thought him "lovely," and who, indeed, had dwelt on his image very often since, broke into rustic blushes. "Oh, yes, sir, I am sure they are in—some of the ladies."

He went up before her, opened the drawing-room door himself, and entered. There was only one figure there, sitting on a little low chair, and looking listlessly out of the window, with her book half closed upon her knee. She did not even look round as she heard the door open.

She was pale. As Fermor did not speak, she looked round, started to her feet with a sort of cry, half ran forward—then stopped, her face and neck bathed in glowing carmine. She felt this rich colour dyeing her face, and put up both hands.

"Quite well?" said Fermor, delighted with these signs of his power. "This is the first day I have got out—the very first hour, I may say—and yours is the first place I have found my way to."

She stood quite irresolute. "Oh," she said, "I am so glad! You must have suffered so much."

"I suppose I shall get strong again," said Fermor, "some of these days. May I get myself a chair?"

Her face assumed a scared look at once. "Oh, yes," she said, "but I am afraid——"

A shade came upon Fermor's fair forehead.

"Afraid? I know," he said; "the regular objection. You are quite right, of course, on the score of propriety. I understand."

"Oh, no, no, no, no!" she said, with extraordinary eagerness, and clasping her hands together piteously. "Not *that* no, indeed!"

Fermor looked at her appealing eyes with admiration—with great satisfaction, too, in himself. "Bird fluttering in the fowler's net, and fluttering so prettily," was the idea floating in his mind. For curiosity and amusement he would make her flutter yet a little more. "You want me to go," he said. "I intrude here. And yet," said he, "for a sick man, tired by his first walk—exhausted, in fact—to be turned out——"

Again the little bird fluttered nervously to the window, fluttered back again, almost wrung her hands. Fermor began to be astonished.

"Oh!" she said, "it seems very odd and very cruel, but I gave *them* a sort of promise. If you *could* come again later; indeed I could not help it; but if *they* come back——"

"I see," said Fermor. "Upon my word, this is taking the shape of a romance. What a pity to put all your family to such trouble—a solemn promise! I assure you there was no need. The shadow of a hint would have——But how a mere call of civility *could* cause any confusion or misapprehension, is, to me, a perfect mystery. Pray assure your family that they may set their minds at rest for the future."

This was more of the fowler and of the fowler's net. The little bird looked at him wistfully, and seemed inclined to sob.

"What *shall* I do?" she said. "I should not have told you. I don't know what you will think! Oh, let me go, please, for I am very unhappy!"

She flew past him out of the room, he looking after her with wonder, half pleased, half mortified. He should like to make an effective stage exit, but there was no audience. His curiosity was, besides, piqued—almost to a vulgar degree—and he was dying to learn more. He walked away, and came back undecided; walked away again, and came back. "Poor little soul," he said, looking tranquilly at a Fermor that was in the glass, "it is all very fresh and natural!"

He rang the bell suddenly, and presently came the maid who had thought him "lovely." He spoke to her with exquisite politeness. "Might I give you the trouble," he said, "to ask Miss Violet Manuel if I could see her again for one moment?"

The girl went away delighted with the mission.

Violet appeared again at the door in sad confusion. "Oh," she said, "I have behaved so absurdly, so childishly, I am quite ashamed. You won't think of it. Will it be too much to ask you not to say that I have told you——"

"A little secret?" said the fowler, smiling. "And to be *our* secret? With all my heart. But what is the meaning of all this? What are these mysterious promises and tyrant relations? Or is it my poor head that is not yet recovered? I think it must be."

She was hanging down *her* poor head, and said over again she had been so foolish and so ridiculous.

Fermor's voice became wonderfully soft. "'Foolish and ridiculous!' No. I cannot think candour and perfect nature to be foolish and ridiculous. Seriously, can I help you? If you were, indeed, to do me the honour of thinking me worthy of being consulted, such poor advice as I am capable of would be at your service. I have seen a little of the world—have been knocked about here, there, and everywhere. I ought to know something. Do consult me, and I am sure I could help you."

A melancholy sort of flageolet voice was the most effective of all the instruments in Fermor's orchestra. He was playing on it now, and with surprising effect.

"Oh, you are so kind, so good," she said, tearfully, "and I don't know how to thank you. But they don't know, they don't understand——"

"*They?* Who?" said Fermor. "You won't be angry if I

'say something—that is, if I suspect that there is a friend of yours who *does* understand. You see, a sick man—from his mere helplessness—hears something occasionally. Now, I know his nature very well, having come in contact with ever so many natures up and down the world. Well, your friend, Mr. Hanbury, is an honest, good soul, that means well; and I seriously tell you, if he does make a mistake, and is hurried out of his regular course by a little honest roughness, I know enough of human nature to see that it is only on the surface."

"Oh, it is not that; but this place, as you know, is full of—stories," said the girl, passionately; "but I don't like him—that is, like him as *they* mean," she added, dropping her eyes in confusion; "and never *can* like him! never! though I were to die!"

"Never like him!" said Fermor, looking round in astonishment. "How singular! How surprising!" (Over and over again, when he got home, did he rehearse this scene with delight and complacency, the exquisite skill with which he had "played" seeming to him above all other efforts of his life.) "Do tell me about this, for really I should have thought—but then I always forget that I have been a sick man with a battered head, and, what is worse, a defeated one, on an occasion when I would have given I can't say what, to have gained a victory!"

Fermor was walking up and down the room as he spoke all this very volubly, his coat fluttering back as he walked, like the drapery of a robe.

"I should have come back to you, to your carriage, to be crowned; but it was no use struggling with destiny. Your wishes, I know, were against me, like a strong gale. You had *your* champion—why not? To say the truth, I never do expect to succeed in anything in life. I expect to be always near it—to want something just at the last moment. See the life I lead, forced to associate with *that* herd—a set of blocks—good in their own way, but for a mind like mine that looks to better things, scarcely companions. But I am a dreamer! Yes; and such dreams! During my illness you cannot fancy what dreams I had, and even visions—especially one night—here—in this house!"

He halted suddenly, and looked at her. Again the carmine flood was rushing to the surface.

He was surprised at his own fluency. He went on, still pacing: "You don't care to trust me, and yet, perhaps, I might be found useful. Yet, I dare say, I could guess at the whole

state of things. I have an instinct for human affairs, a strange instinct. I can read a situation like a book. I can read minds, too. For instance, I can take the front of this house off and look in. I know at once who are my friends. In this house, how many have I? Possibly not one!" (This last sentence he spoke in a low, half-melancholy tone.) "Possibly not one!" he repeated. "But that is a mere personal view. What does it matter? The other day, if there had been a little rough stone where I fell, why I should not be talking to you here—and perhaps boring you now so terribly."

"No, no, no!" said the girl, casting down her eyes; "*indeed* no—I could listen for—that is, I like hearing all this——"

"Then, as for you," continued he, glancing at the other Fermor in the mirror, "I can understand it all. Relatives, sisters, mothers, brothers, who have our interest at heart, and think they understand it better than we do, hurrying us on eagerly into some serious step—all for our good," added he, sarcastically. "But, Miss Manuel, I feel like an old friend to you, and seriously—for it would be affectation in me to say I do *not* see that you have something on your mind—seriously, if by advice or assistance I can be of use, pray employ me."

She looked up at him with her full round eyes, now little, glistening, and tearful.

"Oh!" she said, "Mr. Fermor, I don't know what to do. They are so kind, and so good, and mean so well, and, as you say, all for my interest."

"Exactly," said he, smiling. "Everything disagreeable is for our interest." His intuitive knowledge of nature was surprising to himself.

"And I am, I may say, alone in the house without support, and I do fear I shall be hurried on into a step—which——"

Fermor went over, and sat down beside her on the sofa. He was going to hear it all. It was growing dusk. "Tell me about this, Miss Violet." At that moment the door was opened. A joyous, noisy, hearty figure burst in.

"We have been waiting for hours," it said, in the gayest key: adding, after a bewildering pause, "What! Fermor?"

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH.

THE VIEW OF A MAN OF THE WORLD.

"WHAT! Fermor?" this he repeated after a second pause; the speaker's face halting the while between his habitual laugh and doubting frown. Violet had moved a little apart on the sofa; but Fermor, who always looked on these little "situations" as so many openings for mental training, determined that there should be no awkwardness. Why, indeed, should there be? A man of the world was present.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Hanbury," he said. "The first evening I have got out. And my first visit has been to the charitable friends who took me in, after that stupid blundering accident."

Hanbury was glowing all over, and looking excitedly from one to the other of the two faces. But the last words of Fermor recalled to him certain obligations, as indeed their speaker had artfully intended they should, and checked some unmeaning and perhaps wild speech he was about to make.

"They are waiting for you," he said to her bluntly and even roughly, "down at the beach."

"I can't go to-night," she said, timorously; "I have a headache. It is too late, and I don't care to walk."

But Fermor rose to go. "It is too late even for me. I laugh at myself, but am obliged, in spite of myself, to be an invalid, and take all manner of ridiculous precautions about my health. Mr Hanbury and I can go part of the way together. Miss Manuel and I have been improving each other. I have been teaching her some of my morbid philosophy."

The two went out together, and so this rather extraordinary interview ended. At the door, Hanbury stopped abruptly, and in a gauche, almost rough tone, said, "I am not going your way. I am very sorry, but have an appointment."

"Good gracious!" said Fermor, gaily; "keep it, by all means. Don't think of it. I shall get home very well; not quite an old man yet."

"Such a boor!" he thought to himself; "a true navy!" And he walked along, smiling to himself, and thinking almost with delight of his "consummate acting" in the little piece of that evening. "Charming little creature she is!" he said, half

aloud. "There is really something bewitching about her. If that stupid lout had not come in, she would have told me everything about herself. I knew what she was coming to." Then he thought perhaps it was as well the lout *had* come in, for that confidence might have led on to "a business." "I believe I could wind her round my finger," thought Mr. Fermor, as he entered his room. "Confiding little child!"

These speculations entertained him a great part of the evening. As usual, he got out his little theatre, lit up his castle in Spain, and put himself down walking among the grounds with the little Spanish girl upon his arm. Good old family, he dared to say. After all, a man must settle down some time or other. Then changing the scene to an inner room in the castle in Spain, he saw himself as lecturer, preacher, teacher, moulding this soft mind to his own pattern—a delightful occupation. So he worked the idea through a whole little play, and then—thinking of the earthly creatures down at the barracks, whose ideas were centred in a pipe—contrasted his own intellectual day's labour with theirs, and thought of going to bed.

They came to tell him there was a gentleman below who wished to see him—Mr. Hanbury. Fermor did not relish this visit. "Really, at this hour," he said. "Come, I suppose, repentant. These boors are always as ready to humble themselves, as to offend. Show him up."

Hanbury walked in heavily—stalked is the word—but had scarcely the bearing of a penitent.

"I am sorry," he said, "to come in on you at such an hour, but the fact is, I could not have slept without seeing you. A great deal has happened since I left you this evening, and——"

Fermor, though he had shut his theatre for the night, threw open the doors again with alacrity. The excited "lout" would afford him a little after-piece before going to bed.

"Sit down, do," he said. "The hour is a little unusual, and I will ask you not to stay very long—an invalid, you know. Well, about this horse, eh? You are coming to that?"

Hanbury sat down mechanically, and looked at him. "Horse? no!" he said, impatiently. "You *know* what I mean, and what I am going to say; you know you do. What is the use of this affectation of carelessness? I am tired of it; I want to speak very seriously."

"As seriously as you please," said Fermor, "but, I hope, with quietness. Excuse me saying so. Indeed, if I did not know that you are one of those honest, sincere natures that

must say out what they think, I assure you I should," and he paused for a little and smiled, "I should ring for a candle and go to bed."

"Not until you have listened to me," said the other, standing up excitedly. "We were very happy till *you* came, and she liked me—and it—it—was all—settled almost. And now it is all changed, and I am convinced you have something to do with it. You know in your conscience you have, Fermor!"

"What logic!" said Fermor, smiling almost contemptuously. "Here is a person with whom I have but the pleasure of a very slight acquaintance, but whom I may come to know better, come bursting in on me at scarcely a visiting hour, pours out a torrent of words about a young lady being changed, and says I know it, and can't deny it! What is *it*, pray? What if I *do* know, and don't deny it? All this is what I must call very childish. Now do, as a favour, sit down again and tell me what it is you want, or what you complain of; and let us talk rationally."

Hanbury, very much sobered by this speech, did sit down, awkwardly, after a second's hesitation.

"Listen to me," said Fermor, "for I will reason with you—as we have got so far in the matter, we may as well finish with it to-night. A lady you admire has suddenly changed towards you. Very well. Now, what have I to do with that?"

"Exactly!" said Hanbury, starting up. "Now we are coming to the point. It is very hard. It was all settled. And we were so happy, and—and—Why did you do it? I never injured you," he added, piteously.

"Not intentionally," said Fermor, smiling. A clever allusion to the race day. "But, still reasoning with you (for to another man I would say at once, 'Sir, you have no business to bring *me* to account'), I ask you again, what have I to do with it, having been shut up here for three weeks? Do you suppose, because a young girl, who has seen about as little of the world as a nun, grows a little cold, that you are to go about from house to house ventilating your grief? Really, I must say, for the lady's sake, it is scarcely——"

Hanbury, who felt like a great fish in a great net, feeling his helplessness, and, perhaps, some truth in what had been said to him, now struck out wildly, as it were. "I *can't* talk with you, Mr. Fermor," he said; "I have no gifts that way. But this must be settled one way to-night. I want to know what you mean to do."

"To save time," said Fermor, "and supposing that I do catch your meaning, what would you have me do?"

"Give her up—not see her—not speak to her—yes, to speak plainly, give her up. I know you are superior in many ways. You have been in the world, and know how to manage these things. Can't you find some of the fine court ladies? they are more suited to you. Do, do, Fermor, and leave me her."

"I see it is hopeless," said Fermor. "In fact, it is so very delicate a subject to discuss, and if I were to speak freely on the matter, it would not be respectful to our common friends. If you mean by 'giving up' to cut off visits, or make any ridiculous marked *exposé* of the kind, I decline to do so at once. It is much better to be candid, you know. I can't afford to get into an absurd position for anybody."

Hanbury looked at him hopelessly and helplessly.

"If I *might* suggest anything," continued Fermor, "I should say the proper manly course would be to exert yourself, and go in regularly and win back your position. You know the old saying about women having to be won, and the faint heart, and that sort of thing."

"I see," said Hanbury. "I understand at last. But don't be too confident, Mr. Fermor. I know I am rough, and can't show off in a drawing-room; but still I believe that honesty and manliness will always have some sort of weight of their own. We shall see how it will turn out. I will take your good advice, though I believe it was not meant to be taken."

"Well, you are quite a privileged being here!" said Fermor.

"I won't detain you longer," said Hanbury; "but I see my way. I may know little of women, but I should scorn to find my amusement, or feed my vanity in what they call '*conquest*.' I should prefer trying to save them from such a cruel fate."

"With all my heart," said Fermor, rising and taking the candle; "a very proper rôle, which I quite envy you. But let me tell you it requires some gifts—something more than the mere will. You may break down."

"Never!" said Hanbury, turning to go.

"We shall see," said Fermor. "Well, we have agreed on something. And now will you let me ask a favour?—only one—which is, not to let us have any childish pettishness before other people. It is so absurd. 'Let dogs delight,' you know, but not men of the world, grown up like you and me. There, good night."

"Upon my word," he said, as he lay his head on his pillow that night, "this is getting more and more exciting every minute. It is like a play. This place is really rising in my opinion. I shall have a little excitement here presently. I am almost sorry I gave him that bit of advice. Poor soul! I shall beat him easily."

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

DISCOVERY OF A "TRUE GENTLEMAN."

FERMOR'S days went by tediously enough, solaced, indeed by but little company and the "potted meats" of Mudie, with which he was victualled steadily. In what was to be seen, however, from his back window he began to take a growing interest. Every day there was the same little scene, which he watched, himself unseen, the chair brought out, the cushions, the invalid daughter, with a face that would have been charming to look on if only lit up with the colours of health, and the grim, rigid father, trying to bend his stern economy into the gentle offices of nurse. On him Fermor looked with repugnance. With this salvo—a sort of apology made to his nicer feelings—he began to find an interest that increased day by day in these figures—for to him they were no more. He would have given a great deal to "find out something" about them. But he could not bring himself down to the familiarity of questioning his man, though he knew that his "man" enjoyed the friendship of the "woman" next door.

On the evening before he went out of hospital, as it were, a letter was brought up, in a stiff, broken hand, that looked like a bit of iron paling. "A bill," said Fermor. "How they do persecute one!" He opened it, and read with some surprise:

"SIR,—I called on you lately about a dog which kept my daughter awake a good part of the night. When I waited on you, I assumed, both from your appearance (excuse my saying so), as well as from the way in which I have always found such remonstrances are received by men, that the mere fact of *requiring* the dog to be removed would offend your pride, and that you would therefore meet me with a hostile and impracti-

cable tone. I thought, then, the best way would be to anticipate, and prevent by a sort of firmness, any such reception.

"The thing was too serious to be trifled with. I have but one daughter in the world, who, after a life of roughness and trouble that I long wished to be rid of, has become a life to me that I care for. We had thought her in a decline; but this place has been the first where she has shown any signs of mending. Naturally I felt anxious, and spoke more strongly than, perhaps, was necessary. I see I made a mistake, and that I was speaking to a true gentleman. I have never apologised to any man, and never shall to any man, but, at my daughter's request, I beg to thank you, which I omitted to do, for your so kindly anticipating our wishes.

"I am, Sir, yours,

"JOHN CARLAY."

Though there was an unpleasant taste about this paper, still Fermor was pleased with it. He turned it over and over. "An original," he said. "I said so from the first"—this was scarcely true—"and yet there is decidedly something of the gentleman about him" (which, perhaps, lay in that recognition of the gentleman in *him*). "Very odd," he went on, and thought how curiously true blood thus always impressed everybody. He went to his little writing-case, and, on delicate paper, decorated at the top with two letters, he wrote a coldly polite acknowledgment:



"Captain Fermor begs to acknowledge," &c.

Then he recollected that the other had written to him in the first person; "an ill-bred thing," no doubt, but still, it would look like "ungentlemanly" insolence to freeze him up with an answer in the third. "Now," said he, tearing it up, "that is just what Forsyth, or Showers, or Cadby, or any of those fellows down there would do."

He knew better, and began again;



"SIR,—I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter. I am very happy to find that the misapprehension under which you laboured has been removed. I fancy you will always find that a *true* gentleman will be ready to anticipate any request, so reasonable as the one you made, especially when a lady's health or wishes are concerned.

"I am, Sir, yours truly,

"CHARLES FERMR."

In his present condition of monotony, this little incident was something to think over with interest. He read again his answer to the "day-labourer's" production, and thought nothing could be more nicely turned. It was all sleight of hand, and he looked down at his pale woman-like fingers, and thought how it was that good breeding and gentility helped them to wield that social rapier—the pen.

A couple of days later, when Fermor was quite given back to the world (only he had been recommended to stay in his lodgings on account of the "good air"), he met Major Carter on the road, leaning, more for affection's sake than support, on his son's arm. No one ever saw Major Carter's wife leaning on Major Carter's arm. But then she was in such "wretched health." "So glad to see you," said Major Carter, with his airiest smile of encouragement. "You are looking much better, but not quite restored as yet, I can see. Delicate about here," said the major, put his hand on his own face. "No wonder, I declare. And how are you now?"

"You never came to see me," said Fermor. "I assure you I should have been glad to have seen you. I had no one to tell me the news of the place or anything."

Not in the least affected by this candid confession of motives, Major Carter replied hastily, "Very good of you. Shall I tell the reason? Somerset here knows it as well as I. I said it to him only yesterday at breakfast. Fact was, I knew you would be worried with visits, perhaps with having to talk when you were not in the humour, or having to listen when you were dying to be rid of us. Indeed, I passed the other night, and saw that man that has the horse—Crawfurd, or Hanbury, whatever

his name is—coming out. After that, I felt it would scarcely have been fair."

Fermor smiled. There was a good deal of the gentleman about this major, after all.

"By the way," said the latter, "I knew it would be no use asking you—yet if I did not mention it, it would look naturally very strange—but we are having some friends coming to us to-morrow night, in the French way."

Fermor began to contract sensitively. Here was this man trying to fasten an intimacy on him. "I rarely go to parties; never, in fact," he said, coldly.

"So I said to Somerset this morning. In one sense it is scarcely worth asking you. It was for the Prices—old friends of yours—the Prices of Bletchley."

"What! are they here?" said Fermor.

"Yes, they came when you were sick. Sir Charles Longman, the two Campbells, the Manuels, Mr. Butler our new clergyman, and a few more."

"If I *can* manage it," said Fermor, in a ruminating sort of way, "I'll try. You see, I must take care of myself now."

"To be sure," said the major. "We'll leave it in that way. I'm ashamed to ask a Town man to such a thing, and yet I suspect those manufacturing people, the Slacks, who are giving their sumptuous ball next week—a blaze of vulgar splendour—will not get you to go to them. Tell me if I have guessed right? I know I am only the merest acquaintance of yours, scarcely that, indeed; but I am sure I have judged you right."

Fermor smiled, a little pleased at this compliment. "Finery," he said, "is scarcely my line. Give me ladies and gentlemen, and let them give their parties in a barn, if they like."

"Capital! very good, very good indeed!" said the major. "Ah, Somerset! Somerset!" he continued, sadly, shaking his head: which, though a little vague, somehow did convey to Fermor that there had been a design of taking him for a model, but that it was now plainly hopeless to imitate him.

"An odd thing, too, you will say," the major went on. "I have asked that strange man next door to you, the stiff, gaunt man—Carlay."

"A sad bear," said Fermor, thinking of his own experience of him. "Yet a something—I don't know how, but really there is something of the gentleman about him."

"How singular!" said the major, with admiration. "Somerset, what was our conversation this morning? I confess I am ashamed of myself. *My* first judgment was that he was *no* gentleman. He wanted the air, you understand. I said so to Somerset. But since, I have heard all about him. A most singular history. A good Scotch family gone astray, and all that sort of thing. It is *very* odd. Do you know, Captain Fermor, I envy you that instinct of yours."

"Yes," said Fermor, with quiet superiority; "I think I am pretty well up in *that* sort of thing. I can't be taken in easily."

As he went home, Fermor owned to himself that that Carter was a well-bred sort of person, and, it was easy to see, had mixed in superior circles. He was half inclined to "look in" at his little party.

Sauntering on, he began to think with tranquil pleasure on what he, without affectation, considered his "conquest," and the dramatic scene he had passed through. Marriage was not to be thought of. "Though, I suppose, one of these days!"—that is to say, one of these days the nuptial Juggernaut would demand its victim. He thought he would go and see them again, and have a petite verre of dramatic excitement. He wanted a fillip. He looked at himself. The canvas would do. "Poor, poor Hanbury," he said, smiling, "how he struggled and 'flopped' when he felt my harpoon in him!"

He was coming down one of the little streets of the town, when there crossed it at right angles, about a couple of hundred yards away, that very "poor, poor Hanbury," walking with that very Miss Violet Manuel of whom he had been thinking. They did not see him, and passed out of view in a moment. But he recognised at once a sort of check shooting-coat, which had often offended him on the score of its being in execrable taste; and Hanbury's companion—not from dress, but from an instinct hard to describe—he knew at once. He stopped impatiently, turned back, then turned again, as if he were ashamed of himself for what looked like a mortification. Curious to say, in the midst of all that confusion of anger, disgust, contempt, and disappointment, which seemed to choke him disagreeably, like a cloud of dust, he felt a sudden sharp stroke of pain, not coming from his recent illness or suffering, but of a kind that surprised him. It was not known to physicians or surgeons.

For the rest of the day he was moody, and bitter, and pettish, and felt a curious restlessness, which prevented him settling down to Mr. Mudie, or, indeed, to anything serious.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH.

ROGER LE GARÇON.

CAPTAIN FERMOR often said pleasantly that he was "a social Van Amburgh," and that with his steel whip he could tame any savage human lion. Pleased with himself for his handling of the next-door wild animal, he very soon began to regard the wild animal itself with complacency. It was like a tonic, he thought. And in this train of thought it occurred to him that it would be a "gentlemanly" thing for Van Amburgh to go in and call on the wild animal he had so happily tamed.

He knocked. A grim woman, like a Swiss toy, said that her master was out—out in the garden; which was, perhaps, as good as out. Let him "leave his business," whatever that might be. Fermor, growing highly sensitive, and selecting a card, was nervously making protest against the idea of his being supposed to have business, or of being eager to secure his way. "Not at all! Pray don't—I have not the least wish in the world—just give that, if you please," when there appeared at the end of the hall the tall, grim, cast-iron figure of Mr. Carlay, with a grey hat on, that looked like a steel helmet, and leaning on a stick that might have been an iron rod.

"Captain Fermor," he said, without advancing to meet him, "do you wish me to do anything for you? It is quite useless asking me. I know nobody, and nobody knows me, either in this place or anywhere else."

"Excuse me," said Fermor, hastily, "you quite misunderstand. You need be under no apprehensions. Merely the common every-day form of leaving a card."

"A card?" said the other, taking it from the maid, and looking at it as if it were a curiosity. "Ah! I am outside all this sort of thing. One of the forms, as you say."

Not relishing the way in which his well-meant condescension was being accepted, Fermor said, "I am really sorry to have intruded on you. In fact, I—almost a mistake indeed. So you will excuse me."

He bowed and was going, when the grim voice said shortly, "Wait. Would you care to come into the garden a moment?"

"I don't understand," said Fermor, hesitating. "I don't understand that sort of thing—much, that is,—No. Thanks."

"I should not care to show you what I don't care for myself. I want to show you what I *do* care for—my daughter."

Fermor shrugged his shoulders as though he said, "I object to the whole business, but as there is a lady in the case—lead on!"

The girl was sitting, as usual, in the sun, on a cushioned chair, and her head rested languidly on a soft pillow. Her eyes were fixed vacantly on one point.

"Here," said Mr. Carlay, stalking down upon her with the steady swing of a pendulum, "here is Mr. Fermor, the gentleman who sent the dog away."

The girl raised her head in some confusion, for she thought that it was only her father returning on his old grim beat.

Fermor, himself again in the presence of a lady, thought he would "reassure" her. He was sorry to see she had been suffering. He was sure the air was good, at least *he* had found it so. His, indeed, was only a trifling accident—a mere scratch; people had, however, insisted that it was dangerous.

Fermor used often pleasantly to divide humanity into tongues without ears, and into ears without tongues. The convalescent girl was of this latter class. He might, too, have classed her as a "devotional ear." In a very few moments he had set his fluency stop on, and the "*Moi*"—the *ro eyw*—was whirring round.

"Now take *me*," he said, "for instance. I think I may say I am independent of the usual associations. Someway I have trained myself to it. Other men talk of being bored, and that sort of thing. I can hardly follow them. I confess I have trained myself systematically. I don't allow myself to be bored. I don't make any boast of it," &c. &c.

And in this way he aired the *ro eyw* up and down in a gentle canter, and opened to her the secrets of his personal psychology. She listened at first a little astonished—then not quite following him—finally interested. It was all new to her, who had been accustomed to the grim, gritty, diapason of her sire. She was a soft, amiable girl, all gentleness, made for petting, and to have her hair smoothed through the day by fond hands. Seeing he had touched the proper key, Fermor put spurs to the *ro eyw*, and made it caracole with fire.

The grim Carlay, meanwhile, was walking far away up and down on a beat. He took no account of them, and was no doubt working the cast-iron machinery he called his thoughts. After what Fermor called a "conversation," but which, strictly, was a monologue, he went away.

"Poor invalid," he thought, "what a life she must have!"

And if his conversation had much the same virtue as a king's touch was believed to have, it would surely be churlish not to apply it.

Between the two gardens there was only a low wall. Taking his cigar in the morning—which he did about as regularly as he did his roll and coffee—he could see the “poor invalid” already disposed on her cushions; and, leaning on the wall, he wished her good morning, and asked how she did. He was going to “touch” again, as the kings used to do. His eye noted a little change—a red bow on her neck, and an ornament or two.

Fermor was “refined looking,” and though only visible as a sort of Elgin marble, by reason of the wall, made a very effective torso. He travelled through a couple of cigars before he had finished his monologue. Then he thought, with his skilful powers, he would examine this “child” on her history, about which he was a little curious, which made *her* talk, and the simplicity of her narrative amused him. Then he tried her on reading, she saying that she read a good deal. Did she read French? Indeed! Had she ever read a thing of Roger le Garçon, called “*La Rose en Evidence?*” No? Then would she let him send it in to her?

“Common people,” said Fermor, “taking up that book, would say it was a common thing. Of course they would. *I* found it out. Mind, I don't want you to take *my* view. You must, of course, judge for yourself. I only say this, that if you want philosophy, sense, wit, and human nature, you have it there. Above all,” said Fermor, becoming deeply grave, “it is fit for any lady's perusal—*any* lady's. I am always most careful, I assure you.”

In the evening arrived Roger le Garçon, in paper swaddling-clothes, and sealed with pink sealing-wax. Roger le Garçon had not made his fame as yet, nor did he quite enjoy the esteem on railway stall or bookseller's shelf, which Fermor awarded him. Some day, no doubt, it would come. There was a picture or two, by an artist of the name of Calkinwood, who had been much neglected by the public, and a song or two by an undiscovered composer, in which he discovered beauties corresponding to those of Roger le Garçon; and thus literature, music, and painting, were embodied in Calkinwood, Roger le Garçon, and the undiscovered composer. But the little pale green Roger had gone on many visits to ladies' houses, and had almost travelled round the country like the Kensington Loan Collection.

It was the calumet, or pipe of peace, of all Fermor's intimacies. This was but the first step; then there was to follow a little series of lectures and illustrations of the beauties of Roger le Garçon.

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH.

CAPTAIN THERSITES.

ON the evening of Major Carter's little party, Fermor was dining with his fellows at mess. He had not spoken of it to them, but was surprised to find them all talking of it eagerly and vociferously. He was a little disgusted and inclined to revoke the "gentlemanly" patent he had so hastily issued. But it would have brought discredit on his powers of judgment.

All, however, had not been asked. The major had exercised a nice selection, pulling them like flowers, by the aid of his Landed Gentry, and, with his wonderful discrimination, had asked half a dozen of the very choicest men of the corps.

That very day Showers, who was always playing Thersites in respect of Fermor, came home from leave. Fermor shivered as he saw him sitting opposite. And yet this very Captain Showers was liked by the other men. He had a loud, strong voice, with a fat face and large mouth, on which he produced laughs by very much the action of a forge bellows. He was always telling "good things" and "good stories." The stray one or two who had heard—as in a dream—the names of Hood or Hook, and the single one who had met a joke of Sydney Smith in the stray serious book he had taken up in a dentist's parlour, placed him far above those humorists.

"Well, Fermor," said Thersites, turning suddenly on him, "what made you go and break the horse's back? What had he done to *you*?"

"I broke no horse's back," said Fermor, with quiet dignity. (It was odd, he believed even to the end that there was a magic power in this manner of his that could awe the profane.) "If you had taken the trouble to pick up the details, you would have heard a different story." And pleased with this retort he turned to his evening paper again, and began to read.

Captain Thersites, not in the least disturbed, began again.

"And I am told, I say, Fermor—I am told you got into a

house among a lot of fine girls—best bedroom, and all that—sisters on the stairs with the gruels and codlings—mamma settling the pillow. I don't believe a word of it. You're too proper a man."

A chorus of boys sitting taking in more drink and smoke than was good for their age, broke in with delight, "Oh, Showers, who told you that?"

Fermor, brought up to believe that truth was the most gentlemanly of a gentleman's virtues, said, coldly and seriously, "If you are alluding to the family who so kindly took care of me when I was ill, I must request—as a *favour*," added Fermor, leaning ironically on the word, "that the subject will not be pursued." He had cast this bolt in his best manner, as it appeared to him.

The other, however, was not to be disposed of so easily. "I see," he said; "private grounds. Visitors are requested not to walk on the grass; eh, Fermor? How smart we are? Come, did *they* teach you? Four lessons a guinea? How many days were you in class? Which of them gave lessons, eh?"

This was received with loud laughter. Fermor, getting redder, still looked round from one to the other with a curling lip.

"A most *original* joke," he said, with an attempt at bitterness.

You are improving every day."

"Oh, I only repeat what was told me, and what is reported in the town,"

"And what *do* they report in the town? Pray go on," said olish Fermor. "Oh, pray go on."

"Well," said the other, "as you ask me, I will. You then did your best to cut out another fellow—that heavy-built man with the large horse. And when you thought you had all safe, they suddenly and coolly turned you out. So I think, my dear fellow, to be taking up such people who have behaved in this way, is being rather too good-natured. I only tell you this for your own good, you know."

The delight of the audience at this point knew no bounds. A low-born, ungentlemanly set—he would give the world to mortify them, and put them down.

"Before the man with the large horse our poor friend had to beat a retreat. Of course he couldn't beat the large man and his large horse. A good fortune, I am told. Oh, these women, Fermor, these women! I hope it will be a lesson to you."

Fermor could scarcely contain himself. If he put up with this much more it would become a standing tyranny. "What wise people you all are," he said. "From beginning to end there's not a grain of truth in it."

"Don't be sure of that," said the other, sharply. "They all heard the same, too. At any rate, that marriage is settled, and Twigg here saw the pair walking about the town together. So, my dear friend," he added, rising, "dry your eyes, for your pipe is completely put out."

Again came forth the roar at Fermor's expense, making his ears tingle. "You are going to this party to-night?" he said.

"Well!" said the other, looking round from the door, "suppose I am?"

"Well," said Fermor, "I am going too; and we shall see whether, to use your forcible language, my pipe is put out as you say. I shall leave it to all here. We shall see."

He went to his room chafing. "It is growing unbearable," he said. "No wonder the Service is becoming what it is when such low creatures are let into it. No matter, I shall have them all at my feet yet. I hope they will all go to-night." He then proceeded to decorate himself with his best care and finish, determining, for *that* night at least, to produce an artistic work. The delicate "spiritual" toning of his face would be a new effect under wax-light. By eleven the scaffolding was down, and the figure stood out perfectly finished. He was pleased. As he looked in the glass, something about "a head of Ary Scheffer" occurred to him.

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH.

MAJOR CARTER'S "LITTLE PARTY."

MAJOR CARTER'S rooms were of a very modest order. They were not very large, not very high, not very long, and not very broad. This was known to most people, but it was not so well known that he got them very cheap.

The little chambers, for they were not called "lodgings," which was a mean description, were now blazing with light. They were gay and tasteful, and excellent in every point but room, and, though a sort of polite famine reigned, the major was unaccountably profuse in light. "Light your rooms, light

your rooms," he used to say, in his pleasant way, "Wax he considered the true basis of society. It supplied furniture, gilding, jewels, meat, drink, and clothes—that is, supper, champagne, and dress.

While Captain Fermor dressed, there was a scene of another kind going on not very far away from him, in the house of the Manuels. Mr. Hanbury had been there that evening, but had only seen the eldest Miss Manuel. Her sister was lying down with a headache. Latterly his boisterous tone had been quite tempered down. He had come in very often, and had sat in a moody unsettled way, talkative and silent by spasms. Of this night he had abruptly asked were they *sure* they were going to Mr. Carter's, quite sure? He was told they were sure. Then, in the same disappointed way, he answered that he would go too, as it would be most likely the last party he would be at there. He was tired of the place and of its monotony, and had made up his mind to go away in a day or two. "I am a sort of wandering man," he said, "and half an hour gets me ready for the road. The horses Bates will look after." He amplified this text a good deal, then returned to his inquiry if they were sure—all of them—to be *there* that night? "I should like to go to Australia," he said. "That would be the place for me. The woods and prairies, hunting and fishing. I believe those are the only things I can understand. As for the world and society, I begin to find I am a mere child. I mistake things, the commonest things. I have too plain and matter-of-fact a mind for the world. I believe in my senses, and take words and speeches to be what they mean; and so," added John Hanbury, with a rueful smile, "it is better that I should be off to the backwoods and sheep-walks, unless," he added, "something turns up to stop me." Pauline, greatly distressed, soothed him. "Wait until to-night is over," she said, significantly. Hope came back again into his face.

An hour later, Pauline Manuel was with her sister as she dressed. It was nearly eleven o'clock, and they were late. It was a curious mixture of vehement expostulation and adornment. The younger girl, with her hair down upon her shoulders, was excited, timorous, and a little defiant by turns. Her sister had influence with her, and on this night spoke warmly and almost passionately. She walked up and down, vehemently pleading for the cause she had at heart, with quick gestures and kindling eye. She told her that it was only a cruel nature that would make a plaything of a brave and honest man's heart—a point of

view that rather scared the gentle girl, whose cheeks kindled in a sort of piteous protest. But at half-past eleven, when the elder came down to the drawing-room, she spoke softly to her brother with a sort of satisfaction—a communication, too, that was received with moody satisfaction, as though it was likely that all would be well before the night was over. "The other," said the brother, thinking of Fermor, "will not be well enough to go out at night."

It looked a pretty little party. Careful selection had been made, and but few had been allowed to pass the wicket. "I might have had the whole of our little city," was a speech the host made many times that night, in many quarters, and to many persons. "Indeed, you cannot conceive the pressure that was put on me to get to our poor little party. It is astonishing the lengths people will go. But we made up our minds, Mrs. Carter and myself," &c. Mrs. Carter and himself! Poor quiet soul—she had no mind to make up, nor, if she had, would she be allowed to make it up. He was part of the lighting himself, and his clear, clean face flashed out in all quarters of the room. There was Mrs. Carter, so quiet, so silent and timorous, swept along in the breezes of her husband's conversation.

Fermor arrived very late, and in a sort of agitation. He felt there was something for him to go through that night, though he did not know what. Looking in a little glass below, where his hat was taken by an admiring maid, he thought his face had all the delicacy of Sèvres. The stairs were narrow, and the house offended with the strong fresh savour of new paint and varnish. He was relieved when he saw the blaze of light in the little rooms—then his name was sung according to the due ritual, and Major Carter, at the other end of the room "going about," came down on him affectionately. It was so good of him to look in, to come in this sort of way. He was ashamed to put people in "a little cabin" of this kind. "I know," continued the major, "you will have your pencil out, jotting down notes for a friend or two—Come! you see, I have heard. Do let me off this time."

Fermor smiled.

"Introduce you to anybody?" said the major, doubtfully; then answering himself, after consulting Fermor's face, which had answered him: "No, no! scarcely. I know better than that."

"Thanks, thanks," said Fermor, moving away. "I think I see a few that I know. I shall get on very well. Thanks."

The major had again hoisted his mainsail, and was away, making the opposite corner. Close beside Fermor was a sort of little gipsy encampment, the gipsies of which (though they did not wear red cloaks, and had no fire or kettle) were two pretty girls, whom Fermor knew to be Miss Campbells—Jessie and Fanny. Fermor had often studied, and sarcastically described, their devotion to the Service. They knew every soldier there—dealt with them with an air of proprietorship—gave them orders. Wherever there was a “Campbell girl,” there was a picket of military. If there were a party in a house, and a sheltered nook on the stairs of that house, the curious explorer would awkwardly stumble on a “Campbell girl” concealed behind a curtain. These are, indeed, only Captain Fermor’s observations, who made them a study as he would natural history, and was often sarcastic on it.

Fermor looking round the whole company, at one end saw two bright faces, rich in fulness and colour, which were as effective as a good many of Major Carter’s wax-lights. He saw their brother standing up beside them, looking towards him sourly and distrustfully, while on the other side was bending down a figure whom his instinct told him was Hanbury. When the latter lifted himself from his bent position, and the light from some of Major Carter’s wax-lights fell upon his face, Fermor saw that it was radiant and blazing, with what, in a moment of pique, he would have called “oafish good humour” and happiness. Some of this light was reflected on to the two girls’ faces.

Fermor, feeling another of those sharp pangs which he had experienced before, turned suddenly aside with his best air of indifference, and broke suddenly into the little gipsy encampment beside him. He was scarcely of the pattern for *that* company. He had always treated them with a coldness that was almost insolence. But though thus long outraged, they seemed to look wistfully at him. His irruption was now a surprise, and welcomed with delight. He threw the party of military boys into disorder, who could scarce cope with a craft of this metal. The eldest tossed her head, and was almost obsequious to him. Violet, looking over of a sudden, saw the Christian knight ensnared by the Moabitish women, and started. Hanbury, whose face was like a sunbeam, and who found himself that night drifting deliciously down the river, suddenly found her grow abstracted.

There was now to be music. The eldest Miss Manuel was

taken over to a tiny cottage piano, led by Major Carter, who, leaning on it as it were on a balcony, and looking in her face, talked critically of its beauties and secret powers.

"You don't think much of our piano," he said. "No wonder! You should have had an Erard, the most splendid that could be got for money. Yet I assure you, Miss Van Tromp, Lady Charlotte's daughter, you know, chose it herself. I assure you she said——" continued he, half turning round and addressing a little audience that had gathered—"she said there was a peculiar sustained *ring* in the middle notes which she had never met with in any other instrument. One might be choosing pianos for years without meeting such a thing. Quite an accident."

It did seem wonderful how that dull percussion of wood upon wood could have so struck Lady Charlotte's daughter; but such is the force of prestige and musical authority, that heads were presently seen bent a little on one side at a slight angle, and it was thought that indications of this rare and peculiar timbre were to be detected.

Major Carter listened with pleasure, looking round from one to the other. "As you may imagine," he said, "I only thought myself too lucky, and *snapped* it up at once. And there you see what it is!"

This is a sample of that shining varnish, a bottle of which Major Carter always carried in his conversational pocket. As she broke into her symphony, which had a sort of wild awkwardness, and a lawless measure, she thought she would do her best, and sang a Spanish song, full of a strange defiance and picturesqueness, and in which the clinking sounds of the castanets were heard, and short scarlet petticoats seemed to flash.

This sort of entertainment scarcely fell within the round of amusements the Campbells affected. Music was profitable for them in a certain sense: they found it like the music in a melodrama, effective for "talking through." Fermor entertained them with an active hilarity and gaiety, but he noted, warily, piteous, restless glances stolen over in his direction, and was pleased with his own skill. Presently the brother passed close by, and rather fretted him by a satisfied supercilious air, as who should say, all danger is past and we are now in port. And finally Miss Manuel, having sung her Bolero, and being led past in a sort of progress by Major Carter, looked so bright and "lustrous," and gave Fermor such a warm, cordial, happy greeting, that his brow became suddenly overcast, and his manner

absent; and having accepted a lively sally of Miss Jessie Campbell with an extraordinary relish but a few moments before, he now received the next with his coldest stare, and quite discomposed her. Presently he saw some of the youth of the regiment, whose angry passions he had inflamed by his sudden interference, growling vindictively, telling new ladies to whom they had attached themselves all about the mess-table scene. And Captain Thersites, passing quite close, and lounging past, called out with an unmistakable sneer, "Poor Fermor! I say, I thought we were to wait until to-night!"

Miss Jessie Campbell, who illustrated the thin texture of her small-talk with a border of giggles, that seemed almost hysterical, found herself, to her surprise, left on the broken rafter of an incomplete sentence. Fermor had strode away, clearly not thinking of her, or of what she was saying, and was whispering to Major Carter at the other end of the room; who, delighted and flattered, received the communication with a smile of surprise. "Ah, you think so! What an idea! I am really under obligations to you. The very thing, just as we were beginning to flag a little."

"Quite easy," said Fermor, explaining his theory with great fluency and a professional air; "move away these things—get those dowagers into the corners—the young ladies to play by turns—less formal, you see; and we can make a beginning, say—with—with," added Fermor, looking round the room—"ah, Miss Manuel!"

"To be sure, so we can," said Major Carter, in a tumult of delight.

"And you can get Mr. Hanbury, and some of those strong men," continued Fermor, "to clear the room—a sort of fatigue party."

Miss Manuel was delighted—pleased to do anything useful on that night. And Hanbury, called over, was presently warehousing all the furniture of the room in corners, stowing away heavy weights with enthusiasm. At every party there are honest creatures like this, who revel in being made social hodmen. The "boys" assisted with juvenile delight, and there were marvels done in the way of wheeling off on castors, and hemming up one of the Miss Campbells (engrossed with Mr. Lockit) behind an ottoman. Mr. Lockit had helped her off the broken plank where Fermor had left her, and they both agreed that a more vain, conceited, brusque creature never was—with "nothing in him."

When Hanbury, boisterous—even heated—with his exertions, looked round for general approbation, he saw Fermor on the very chair he had quitted for a few seconds only. At that distance, too, he could even see that Fermor was speaking very fast and earnestly, and that Violet was listening with an absorbed devotion. Had this been a crafty artifice on the part of Fermor? It must be said, such were not his usual weapons.

Hanbury plunged over in a blunt hurried way. "They are going to have a quadrille," he said, "and—and I am come for you—that is, if you will dance."

Fermor looked up at him with his most good-natured smile. "You have been doing wonders," he said; "we have been looking at you. Properly, Miss Violet is engaged to me, but I *think*," he said, "we shan't dance at all. Now, I tell you, *you* should make yourself useful, and ask some of those people yonder.

He looked at her for an answer, but she gave none. "Are you engaged?" he said.

"Good gracious!" said Fermor, "have not we told you? Why——" and he whispered something to her, with a smile and a look of intelligence. Hanbury did not mind the smile, but when he saw the look, he turned round and walked away. Miss Manuel, who had been playing scraps and patches of music very pleasantly, had seen the whole of this little episode, and flew across to speak to her sister. Between sisters these expresses are common, and she whispered a few words; but they were vehement words, full of concentrated meaning. But, "So you are really to be our orchestra," came to her ear in the voice of Major Carter. "I don't know what to say to you, it is so kind." And he made a coasting voyage round the room, saying to every one, "You see who I have got for the orchestra." "Miss Manuel is good-natured enough to touch my little piano, Miss Van Tromp," &c.

Fermor and his companion were the only two not dancing. Every one standing up in the little hollow square looked round at them as at something conspicuous or marked. The orchestra must have thus been busy herself, for she had a sort of reputation for this kind of playing, and her fingers used to perform whole ballets on the keys; but now it wanted spirit, and she was glancing uneasily over the top of the little cottage piano.

No wonder. For all this time Fermor's words were pouring out very fast. Violet seemed to be feasting on them as on some delicious fruit. There was a tender air about her that night,

her eyes had a soft shy look, and she had a half helpless, half tender and trusting manner, which to Fermor was fascinating.

"If you would only confide in me—my advice has been found useful sometimes—I should give you the best I am capable of. Or perhaps—and you won't be angry?—I know the story, or can guess it all."

A softness, too, had come upon Fermor's voice, and covered it like a delicate bloom. The lustrous eyes seemed to lift themselves to meet his, not so much languidly as reverently.

"There is pressure, persuasion, what may be called family intimidation, put upon you," he went on, a little excitedly. "From the best motives, no doubt. I know not what that sort of thing means. If we put our home lives side by side there would be a wonderful likeness. These things repeat themselves. But I can use a firm resistance. We men can fight, but you are helpless."

"Oh," said she, softly, "it is so good of you. But I cannot ask you. I ought not to speak of these things, but in some way I feel——"

"You feel," said Fermor, with his "lighter scornful manner," as he would call it, "that I am not exactly the person—quite so. You take what I say for mere fashionable words of course. Exactly. Why not choose that rough, honest creature yonder, who is glaring at us so savagely?"

Honest John was, indeed, looking back from his ranks in the quadrille in sorest distress, and then dancing with desperate indifference.

What Fermor intended when he sat down he could not well tell himself. If any one had said to him, "You are going to embark on the rough stormy waves of a great ocean—mind, I warn you," he would have smiled, and have returned with his usual triumphal air of victory. In the same way, if any one had said to him, lightly, "You are going to amuse yourself with a poor girl, and make a plaything of her," he would have scouted the idea, and, by way of compensation, have been gracefully considerate to her the whole night long. The truth was, he did not know what he wanted, or what he intended. He only felt a void of longing for a dramatic scene, and he felt himself gradually drawn on and on to the stage.

"Well," said Fermor, "shall I tell you all?" He waited a moment. "The wretched gossips of this wretched place have the whole story too. They say it is a very suitable thing; riches, honesty, the good 'bluffness' of the novels, and a warm attachment."

"Oh ! never, never," said she, not lifting her eyes. "I know you are my friend, and have been so good—this is no harm they wish me ; they are pressing me cruelly, and I am not strong enough to resist. But, oh, Captain Fermor, the thought makes me wretched !"

Never did he enjoy a dramatic situation so much.

"Why," said he, with pleasant astonishment, "how all this surprises me ! I declare I thought it was an old attachment !"

"It was, it was, until——" She stopped

"Until what ?"

She was colouring and flushing, and dislocating her fan. "Oh," she went on, "I am so unhappy, and I don't know what to do. I have no friend. I am alone in that house. They are all against me, except mamma. And they say, and it is true, that it would be so dishonourable, he is so good and generous and faithful. And, and then——" she hesitated, "I must decide to-night, for he is to go away to-morrow for ever, and——it makes me wretched."

She was so beautiful in her confusion, so delicate, so brilliant, that Fermor, in a warm infatuation, lost in a second his cold and steady command of himself. The reins slackened in his hand, and he was carried away by the whirl of dramatic effect. Even in a flash of a second he had a glimpse of Captain Thersites opposite, motioning him out with his eyes, to the lady he was dancing with ; to whom, no doubt, he was stooping and whispering contemptuously.

That look decided him. Perhaps the triumph of so splendid a repulse—the vision of the mess-table—this might have been the little straw, the feather, perhaps, that turned the balance. He bent down his head and whispered to her softly

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE TWO SISTERS IN COUNCIL.

THAT dance was done. The orchestra came over hurriedly from the little piano, released at last. Her lip was compressed, and her eye severe. Fermor got up, and with a curious flush in his face, moved away. Hanbury, "hanging about" undecidedly for a time, seemed to draw near in gradually narrowing circles, and finally stood before Violet with a piteous injured

look. He found comfort in the sudden change in her manner. She was excited; talked and smiled excitedly. She was eager to dance, and accepted when he proposed it. Her manner, however, was "distracted," and though she answered him a little at random, he accepted her smiles in place of a more direct answer. Her sister, delighted, again volunteered to step into the orchestra; and, looking with beaming face over the little cottage piano, poured forth a mad tantalising galop, that challenged every foot in the room. It was only "a carpet dance;" but presently the Miss Campbells, each armed with a military boy, were hurrying round, their dresses sweeping the faces of older dames who were seated. Major Carter looked on in delight. "'Pon my word,' he said, "this is surprising; quite a gay little rout! Come on me by surprise!"

Fermor's heart was beating as he looked on.

"Won't do," said Captain Thersites, passing him. "I say, Fermor, poor fellow! look over there."

Fermor looked after him with triumph and contempt. "Fool!" he thought, "this will put *him* down." And for many minutes he enjoyed this thought.

At one o'clock came in a few emaciated ices, and some phials of coloured sugar and water—"sorbetts" on the French plan. Abundance, however, was supplied, or the poverty of material covered, by the triumph of the entry, which was in all the clatter of ice-spoons and the jingling of innumerable glasses. With which was mixed up the voice of Major Carter, chanting an anthem: "Take an ice! *do* take an ice! Let me get you a sorbet. We try to have Paris over again, in our little way, of course. I am afraid I am half a Frenchman *Do* have an ice," &c.

It was a very happy little evening; such good humour on all sides. Not till nearly two did they go away.

Hanbury drifted after the Manuels down stairs. Rude joy was on his broad honest face, yet he was a little doubtful and mystified. As they went down, the elder girl had just opportunity to whisper with delightful anticipation, "Well! all settled, I am sure." To whom John answered, as secretly and as ecstatically, with a friendly look and crushing squeeze. And, while Hanbury was getting her cloak, Miss Manuel turned to her brother, and, in the same delightful whisper, told him, "All settled. Poor, good John! How happy he is!"

Afterwards, there was a sort of hurried conclave sitting in the

eldest Miss Manuel's room—a wild, flurried meeting. The mother, Mrs Manuel, was called in to listen. “I knew it,” said the younger girl, rapturously. “I told you so, in spite of all you said, and all you prophesied. *Now* has he not redeemed himself?” and she looked round on them, from one to the other, very triumphantly. Her eyes were glistening, her cheeks glowing; she was curiously excited, as, indeed, a very small occasion would excite her. She was the heroine of the moment. Her face seemed to play with repeated flashes of light. Like a child in her joy, she walked up and down before them, in little quick short marches. The others looked on her with pride, and yet with sadness.

“Yes, dear,” said her sister, “you were right—and will be very happy—but the only thing is, I am thinking——”

The younger girl stopped her. “Now for the difficulties,” she said, smiling; “you dear, wise, old-fashioned Pauline. You are going to give me advice. I know you are.”

“No, indeed,” said the other; “but I am thinking—and I cannot help thinking—of poor, *poor* John. What is to be done with *him*?”

Violet's eyes were suddenly cast upon the ground. For a few moments there was silence.

“I *have* thought of him,” she said, “and, indeed, I am very sorry. He is so good, so kind, so generous. He is so strong. He may suffer a little at first. But he will get over it. I could not help it, you know, dearest Pauline, I could not. I did not know ~~my~~ own mind, and thought I liked him.”

Her brother, who had come in, was now standing in the doorway.

“There is the misfortune,” he said, gravely. “How will that console him? Such a brave, honest, faithful man. Ah, Violet, take care!”

“He is indeed,” said the young girl, eagerly, and in some confusion: “and he has been *so* good to me! And I have behaved very cruelly. But I did not mean it, and I am sure—I know—he has such a sensible, manly heart—that after a little time he will——”

“Ah, exactly,” said her brother, excitedly; “it is these sensible manly hearts that feel these things. No, no; I know him by this time. This will spoil his life—or many good years of his life. This is not a mere scrape or scratch. Poor Hanbury!”

“I am very unfortunate! I am very miserable!” she said,

looking from one to the other in great distress. "I never thought—I never meant it: *indeed*, I did not;" and her soft eyes began to grow dim with coming tears.

The elder girl, who, up to this moment, had been supporting all that her brother had been saying, now suddenly deserted him, and running to her sister, put her arms about her.

"No, no," she said, "things will turn out much better. Poor John is sensible, as you say, and will suffer a little at first, like all men. He is strong. Come, darling, don't think of him. We shall see him in the morning, and set it right. After all, the point is that you are to be happy—and you must be happy."

The brother, still gloomy, sighed. "Ah! that is the point," he said, dejectedly; "we know so little of *this* man."

The elder girl had made her protest, as a duty. She now cast away her grim grandmother's cloak and hood and crooked stick. Shutting her eyes, she got rid of the gravities of judgment and sage counsel; and the two talked the new engagement over when they were going to bed—rapturously, as sisters do in council. Alone together, letting their hair fall, and undressing by slow, lingering stages, everything became gold, and colour: the richest gold and the richest colour. The little scene at Major Carter's party was acted all over again, and over again after that, with pre-Raphaelite detail.

Violet had soon swept away any momentary clouds. She was walking up and down, full of enthusiasm, and telling all to her sister with charming confidence. "From the first day he spoke to us, you recollect, dear, near the gate, I somehow felt—I can't describe it—a sort of sensation that he was to be—something to me. It came on me like a flash. There was something in his eyes, and you recollect how he came to me straight—and I understood him—and he almost told me," she added, shyly, "he had much the same feeling about me."

"And you never told me," said her sister, "to whom you tell everything, or say you tell everything, you quiet, sly child, whom I thought so innocent. I suppose you were afraid about poor John."

"Yes," said Violet, dropping her eyes, "you were all such friends of his."

"And I suppose," said her sister, "it was on the same day that poor John's fate was sealed."

"Why, I am afraid so," said Violet, still looking down. "And oh! Pauline dear, it was the most curious thing in the

world. For I did like him so, and admire him up to that day: I did, indeed. And he really seemed quite handsome until——”

“Until the other came,” said Pauline. “Well, you won’t be angry, but if I were to compare the two, in point of looks——”

“No, no!” said Violet, with childlike eagerness, “indeed he’s not. There’s something so refined, and so calm and quiet about him, and so intellectual——”

“Say perfect, at once, darling,” said her sister, kissing her.

“Ah, that is the thing,” said the other, sighing. “What will he say when he finds out how much below him I am in knowledge? Indeed, I told him as much. But he has promised,” she said, brightening, “to teach me everything himself, and to ‘form my mind,’ as he says.”

“Your poor little mind!” said her sister, with a sigh.

Not until he got to his own room, that night, when the foot-lights were out, and the linen covers put round the boxes, did Fermor awake. Daylight, grey and cold, mixing oddly with his lamp, was coming in at his window. He felt a sort of sensation that he had taken some fatal step, and could not turn back.

“Perhaps I have been too hasty,” he said. After every step of any decided sort, this indecision comes, which perhaps arises from the feeling that it is impossible to go back. Fermor sat long in that mixed light, gazing a little vacantly at his watch and guard-chain. “How could I have been so hurried?” he said. “I might have waited a little.”

Then he thought of his mother, at Nice, Lady Laura Fermor, a cold woman of fashion, of reduced means. Perhaps this was the spectre that was threatening him. And he had to reassure himself with his Spanish castle, setting that Miss Manuel walking through the grounds in shadow and in rich light. Self-confidence came to help him. “A good sensible letter,” he said (“one of *my* good sensible letters,” was the special shape of the thought), “will set the thing in its proper light before her. After all, a man can’t go on in this unprofitable way, neither good nor useful to himself nor to others. I should be ashamed to descend into the grave after such a selfish career. No, she is charming! such devotion, such pretty devotion, I have never seen.” And the recollection of it, with his own excellent playing all through it, came back on him more acceptably. With an eagerness not unnatural, he got out his ink and crested and initialled paper, and actually wrote the “good sensible letter” to his mother. It could go by the morning’s mail, and he would have an answer signifying its effect within a week.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND.

FERMOR'S NEW CHARACTER.

THE sensation produced in the little colony when the news got abroad, which it did very soon, was something astonishing. It was passed from hand to hand, like a fire-bucket at a conflagration. There were those who had never thought it, and those who had always thought it; those who believed it from the beginning, and those who now *could* not believe it; with a smaller and more select class whom it affected in a rather overwhelming way, falling on them "like a thunderbolt."

Fermor detested undue publicity of this sort, and to have any plans of his special life made free with in the common speech was a gross liberty. He froze over all congratulations. It was wonderful—when he looked back on the singular and sudden step he had taken—how one of his character could have carried himself so steadily through. But, as he said to himself pretty often, the "truly balanced mind" is never surprised, and suffers no starts or shocks. Everything is foreseen, and everything falls into the tranquil daily current. Besides, he had within him an extraordinary amount of what he took for resolution; but which, when the tests and acids came to be applied by a moral chemist, sank to the bottom, resolved into a powder composed of vanity and a little obstinacy. The vanity could not allow him to think he *could* have made a mistake. •

He had now, too, his melodramatic dress on. He felt that he could enjoy the luxury of being "generous," and thought with quite a suffusion of noble feelings of the case of John Hanbury. His worsting of that gentleman, and overthrow of other enemies, were indeed complacent thoughts he was never weary of entertaining. One of the first things he did was to call on John Hanbury, and, as he walked to the house, he had his hand out, morally, all the way.

Hanbury was at his desk, and had been writing, but his face was covered up by his hands, and when he looked up, Fermor was almost startled by the plain marks of suffering and anxiety. In all projecting places it had been sharpened, and all colour had passed away.

Hanbury received him with a violent flush, and a paleness as violent. "To what am I indebted——" he was beginning, with a clumsy attempt at cold dignity, which amused Fermor.

"Come, come!" said the latter, putting out his physical hand this time, just as he had rehearsed it, "let us be plain and above-board with one another. I am sorry about the whole business, for your sake, indeed I am. But you must consider what I am: take a plain, practical view."

The other took his hand doubtfully. "I did not expect it—ah! I scarcely expected it of you, Fermor," he said, mournfully. "I would not have behaved so to another man."

"Poor childish creature!" thought Fermor, pityingly, yet singularly gratified with himself, "how absurdly he feels it, or *shows* that he feels it." Fermor himself, in a similar case, would have let the fox under his uniform eat his heart out—at least, so he thought. "Come, come! you will be reasonable, I know. You will bear it in a manly way, I am sure, when you think of it coolly."

"Ah!" said the other, bitterly, "with some that comes very natural. There *are* people who think of everything coolly; I can't: I wish to God I could; I would not be as—as miserable as I am." He sat down again at his desk, and put up his hands. "It was a new life to me," he went on, in a sort of dismal monotone. "It was like a change to heaven—I mean, all these last few months. I never, never was so happy! And I firmly believe *she* was as happy, and liked me—for a time, at least—until—until——Ah!" he continued, appealing piteously to Fermor, "why did you do it? How could you amuse yourself with such heartless sport? *You* will have had things of this sort over and over again; with me it happens only once. It is a whole life, and now that you have taken away life from me, what is left to me? I tell you, Fermor——" He stopped himself. "After all, I suppose *you* are not so much to blame."

"Now," said Fermor, laying his hand on his arm, "if you would listen to me for a moment I think I could put the matter in such a reasonable light, that——"

"I know, I know," said Hanbury, dismally. "But I don't want reason, it is a poor comfort to me. I suppose it is all right—it *was* to be, and so it came to be. Of course she has her free will, and could change her mind if she pleased. It would be very hard if she couldn't."

"Now, that is a rational way to take it," said Fermor; "and if I could speak of myself as a third person—only it is a little delicate, you will admit—you see, as I said before, I was really passive in the business. And you will pardon me, I think, if I remind you that at our last meeting you really almost threw

down the glove. You recollect? Now, when a man's pride is appealed to, and he is put upon his mettle—you see? I really don't know but that, if you had appealed to me as you did now—that is, put the thing in the present forcible light——”

“Oh, I know,” groaned Hanbury. “I am sure of it. But I am so awkward, and clumsy, and stupid, I always do something heavy and foolish. And now,” he continued, with a doleful smile, “the only thing left for me is to bear it as best I can, and go away to the sheep-walks again. I am sure to make no blunders there. Good-bye.”

Fermor went away full of real pity and compassion for this “honest poor soul,” who in so confiding a way exhibited his foolish heart to all comers. “He will hawk his sorrows all over the place,” thought Fermor. “Perhaps it would be the best thing that could happen to him, if he only knew how to get profit out of his misfortune. But he does not. If I were in his place, it would be a whole fortune to me.” Even as it turned out, it *was* a whole fortune to him, for Hanbury's acute sufferings seemed to make his victory more precious.

But it was not until he first saw Thersites Showers in full mess council, when the chiefs met at dinner, that he reaped all the profit of the step he had taken. When Fermor came in among them they now looked at each other shyly, and at him with reverence. They were boys after all, and they felt their boyhood. Here was their master. The horse-race had established him: so, too, had this *oth r* race. They all seemed to feel their littleness in his presence. He walked in like a hero, and was very gracious to them. But his real superiority lay in the defeat of Showers. Just as the regiment had its adjutant and messman, and even a brains-carrier or two, so Showers was kept in pay as their sarcastic sharpshooter. In a lull, or in a critical moment, he was ordered to the front, like the comic-song singer among the privates on a march. Now he seemed to be cashiered. He had broken down, and was held in contempt.

“Somehow,” said Fermor, after the mess dinner, in the great arm-chair, and with his hands in his pockets, looking down the length of his legs, as it were along an engineer's level, “you see I know myself thoroughly, and what I can do. Anything I lay myself out for seriously, I can bring about in the long run. I don't,” continued Fermor, modestly looking round on them all, “set up to do *more* than other men, but, you see, I make more of my materials. Another thing,” he continued, “when I make up my mind to a business, I always have it done *at once*.”

Every second of dawdling over a serious step is diminishing its value. It is like," continued he, smiling at some pleasant little fancies that were coming into his mind, "like, say, so much out of the proceeds of a bill—commission, brokerage, and that sort of thing." And in this fashion Captain Fermor lectured away for a long time to a very serious and attentive congregation. He came home very well satisfied with himself, in a conviction that he *had* really carried off a prize, defeated innumerable competitors, and was on a sort of envied tableland looking down on all, and regarded by all with a wistful admiration.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD.

THE FERMOR FAMILY.

LADY LAURA FERMOR, fourth daughter of a late Earl of Hungerford, was well recollected, by many gentlemen with grey whiskers, as Lady Laura Stonehewer. Tall, almost plain, with gaunt shoulders, kept in confinement by secret power below, from which they seemed struggling to escape, she had perfect "style" and "tone;" and as she performed her scenes in the circle with daring, and went round and round in the social circus with rapidity, came to be vastly admired. Like the ugly Mr. Wilkes, she was but a few seconds behind the loveliest; and some extra exertion and hard riding always brought her to the front.

She had been long in the service. For years she had been in the drawing-rooms, and met only indifferent sport. At last, a mild country gentleman—Thornton Fermor, Esq., of the Holyoakes—looking down one evening, saw her in her gauze and spangles dashing by, almost covering him in a cloud of the sawdust. He was delighted with her "dash" and action. The shoulders were, luckily, not insubordinate. There was another gentleman "after" Lady Laura, Mr. Westende, later Sir John, whose prospects were not so good, and who was said to have been badly treated; but his sufferings were of small moment. Lady Laura Stonehewer became Lady Laura Fermor, and retired down to the Holyoakes, where the surrounding gentry delighted in sending notes, requesting the pleasure of "Mr. Fermor's and Lady Laura Fermor's company at dinner," and positively rang

them joyfully together in concert, as though they had been a peal of church bells.

In due time they began to contribute to the *Heraldic Koran*; and the mild Thornton "by her had issue:"

1. Charles Hungerford;
2. Alicia Mary;
3. Blanche; and
4. Laura.

Charles Hungerford grew up, became a fashionable child and boy, never showed the least taste for ostler or kitchen society, and, in the lower ranks, was considered a cold, "stuck up" lad, with "no manners." To him his mother was a missionary, preaching the gospel of good society, and the companionship of genteel confessors. "However high you are," she was always saying to him, "look a little higher, and you will be sure, if you do not advance, at least to keep your place. Everything has a tendency to slip down." So with dress and appearance. The best clothes, the dearest and best tailor, were cheaper in the end than the cheapest and meanest, as they returned all outlay in the respect and consideration they brought with them. So with select companions and tastes; and Charles Hungerford became an eager catechumen in this faith, and a little fanatic.

Thornton Fermor, Esq., had only a genteel patrimony, and as Alicia Mary, Blanche, and Laura junior, as well as Charles Hungerford, were encouraged in the same costly virtues, their combined outlay became a serious total. Charles Hungerford was sent, not so much to a fashionable school, as to a fashionable set at the school. Till he was twenty he sat everywhere in a private box. Lady Laura, taking stock of her labours and good deeds, often said that she had at least given them the best education "that money could procure," which really meant no more than that they had been well grounded in the best juvenile society that could be found. She herself a wonderful captain, seemed not to care either for eating or drinking, or, above all, for sleep. What she found in the hard, hopeless sort of life she lived, and which she called "gaiety," would be difficult to discover.

Thornton Fermor was a sort of quiet woman in a man's dress, and received orders from her. She felt a little twinge when Mr. Westende became Sir John: but she did not vent this wrong on Mr. Fermor. And it was just as well. She had just settled that Charles Hungerford, who had been at Oxford studying young Lord Chester and Sir Victor Banbury, and other young

gentlemen of quality, should be "put" into a Guards' regiment, when Thornton Fermor glided away out of the world—exactly as he used to glide away of an evening out of his home racket to a tranquil club—but leaving his affairs, as friends told each other, "in sad confusion." A huddled hasty settlement of things was effected. Charles Fermor had to "go" into a corps where there were no youths of quality, but only the sons of thriving merchants; where the senior captain was the second child of the well-known Manchester horse repository; and where some of the junior ensigns bore names that awkwardly and pointedly suggested brewing, cotton-spinning, and colonial produce. Finally, Alicia, showing symptoms of "weakness of the chest," Lady Laura Fermor broke up her camp, loaded her baggage-carts, and marched for Nice; whence very soon was written home news of "Alicia's chest being restored."

It was hard not to admire the boldness, the energy, the unflagging spirit of this untiring woman. If she had ever thought of the unimportant little matter of making a soul, or could have spared any time for such a business, she would have held a high spiritual place. She worked out a fashionable salvation with infinite mortification of the flesh, and all manner of painful austerities in the narrow and thorny paths of social pleasures. Poor lady! Did she ever smile when she heard the select preacher at the select church she attended, declaiming against what he called the "alluring seductions" of the world? At her time of life, a lawyer, a merchant, a soldier, who had seen such service as she had seen, would think of honourable retirement. The soldier, spent and battered, might honourably retire to his Chelsea or his Invalides; she was entitled to her pension, her seat in the sun, and, figuratively, her tranquil pipe. She might gossip with other veteran dowagers, also in honourable "retreat." But this undaunted woman was only thinking of new fields and new campaigns.

Yet she worked under grave discouragement. Alicia Mary, Blanche, and Laura, with remarkable promise as children, did not answer early expectation. In all of them there was a tendency to inherited gauntness. Late bivouacking and exposure had told roughly on Alicia Mary and her sisters. Their mother did what she could with them—almost tried to reconstruct them altogether. She might dress them with costliness and in the best taste, of which she had abundance, and she might turn on perfect conduits of porter and port and "nourishing" stimulants; she might push and twist them untiringly, wearily drill-

ing them : it would not do, and could not be done. Could she fill in the hollow gaps in their necks and shoulders, and pare off those sharpnesses which projected like chimney-piece corners, she would have had more than mortal skill. No wonder that Captain Singleman, in his coarse way, said of the young ladies they were a "hopeless lot." Still she persevered, and by never relaxing her efforts, by ceaseless training, by dressing them well, by talking of them as superiors, and filling the air round them as they marched with the sound of the Stonehewers and other family titles, like Turkish music, and, above all, by hurrying up when she saw them broken, and making them form square, she managed to secure for them a place and a sort of false prestige. Thus they were always led out to the dance, and never looked on sadly at the whirling measure while others danced.

At Nice, things seemed brighter. In that quarter there was what her ladyship called an opening—a destitution in the matter of good serviceable girls. There unsound chests, "affected" lungs, and consumption, went out to parties, and, with flushed cheeks, were ready to stand up and go through the dance with all comers. The delicacy of Alicia Mary's chest was quite a different sort of thing. In this narrow little paddock "Lady Laura Fermor" was said to be quite an addition. She had the freedom of every drawing-room at once presented to her. She took, almost as a matter of right, the fowling over those moors. Afar off her wary eyes had already marked down something stirring in the underwood. She came, not unprovided with reliable information. She knew of some young and noble chests that were "threatened," and, as she had anticipated, found young Gulliver and Lord Woodleigh, yet younger and more tender in years, already in this happy sanatorium. These youths idolised the valse and the wilder galop, and Alicia Mary and Blanche ambled round in those measures with singular grace and agility. It was a surprise to meet these young men so far away, in one of the little narrow chambers where the Nice festivals were given. A few of the colony—the Welbore Cravens, the Browns, the Selwyns, and a delightful French family, the "La Motte-Terrays," whom all the select English knew—"saw each other" a good deal.

"Ah! that winter we spent at Nice!" said Major Brown, a couple of years later. "You remember, Fanny? The nice little parties we gave to each other. No scandalous waste in suppers, and music, and tumbling the house out of windows as we do in this absurd country. You stuck a few wax-candles

about, and squeezed a dozen of lemons, and the thing was done. We went from one house to another. 'Sir, you have me to-night, and I have you to-morrow night.' The prettiest girls came to us, and how they enjoyed themselves! You recollect that young La Motte-What's-his-name, when he got up the cotillon at our house?"

This style of entertainment suited Lady Laura Fermor's taste exactly. She called it "rational enjoyment," and she carried out the total abstinence principle even further than her neighbours. As conquerors make war support war, so she made dances support dances, and guests support guests. She artfully went round "drawing the line," exposing plaintively unworthy intrigues that had been set on foot to break into her select pleasure-grounds, and actually succeeded in setting an artificial value on her little cheap "drums." People struggled to get admission to those little hot rooms, and Alicia Mary, Blanche, and Laura junior, were contended for with animation. As they drifted of a night into one of these festive cabins, with their indomitable parent in the front of the little procession, young Gulliver and the younger Woodleigh came swooping down on them, eager to secure them—both showing signs of excessive heat. In those youths, indeed, they exercised a sort of proprietorship: with them they exchanged glances of intelligence and significant words. At their humorous sallies—and sometimes they gambolled before them in the Ethiopian manner—the sisters Fermor were convulsed; their sense of the humour of the exhibition contending with an attempt at grave reproof. Lady Laura, true and faithful night after night, got into her uniform and went on duty in the trenches; and, all through wet and exposure, exhaustion and fatigue, never once failed; never *would* fail unto the end.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

A DIPLOMATIST.

LATER on, Lady Laura was telling friends how she was now expecting her relative, Sir Hopkins Pocock, C.B., late governor of certain colonies—Prince Rupert's Island it might have been—a gentleman whose profession was Governing, and who was now moving round pleasantly from one Governing station to

the other. He was not unknown, for it was he who, after long and harassing boundary wars, had concluded the famous treaty with the Waipiti tribe. Before this diplomatic triumph he had been in the Indies, and was said to have collected wealth. Waiting now till he should begin Governing again—and there was to be a vacancy in a few months—he was coming to Nice for some trifling repairs.

She had discounted him in advance. At languid little teas, at the furious Dervish dances of Major Brown, she menaced them with her relative, flourished him in the air, brought him down on them at intervals like the lash of a whip. Finally, at one of the little parties organised for the purpose, she discharged him among them as if he were a cartridge. These select persons were taken into custody, as it were, led off to be introduced to "my relative," Sir Hopkins Pocock, and found themselves bowing before an exceedingly tight and clean-made little man, whose clothes were dapper and clean-made too, and rather spare as to their material, so as to give no undue advantage to diplomatists on the other side. He had a round pink head, pierced for two small twinkling eyes; cheeks, lips, chin, and throat, shaven away right and left, as if, again, to leave nothing that could afford a ready purchase to the opposing diplomatist. Over him was a general air of perkiness, with a special air of perk in his nose, in his chin, and in the front portion of his lips, which he brought to regular points.

He had a marvellous fluency, and five minutes after the company had assembled, his talking was trickling smoothly over two or three gentlemen on the rug, like oil from the thin spout of an engine-driver's can. He illustrated this stream with perks, and put himself through all the gentle spasms of a Robin. Such an opportunity being not likely to recur, they had got him on the state of Europe, and on the schemes of designing powers, and the conversational oil was flowing very freely indeed.

He would illustrate it, he said, by a matter that came within his own experience (oil-can to Major Brown) when he was busy concluding that treaty, which they might have heard of, with the Waipiti tribe. He had had the honour of finally determining the great boundary question. Mind, *he* did not accept the foolish stories then current about the Waipiti being worked by other parties who were pulling the wires. Some pointed to the Omai country; some, to beyond the hills. It would not be betraying a state secret to say, now that the thing is past and gone, that Harboard, Minister for Waste Lands and Marshes,

held this strongly in council; so did Bond (afterwards Premier), who went out on the squatter question. But he (turning the oil with a jerk on to Brown) simply said, "Wait—simply wait." No groping in the dark. And what was his principle? People at home, and people abroad, and people generally, still wondered what was the secret instrument he had used in composing these Waipiti troubles. Other governments and other governors had tried before him, and—no discredit to them—had failed. And why? Simply because they ignored this obvious principle: "Never *seem* to want what you want." There was the whole of it. The world was welcome to know it. The result was, he believed, pretty well known at home and abroad. Upon his word, that was the whole secret history of the transaction. He was glad it should be known. And the whole concluded with a general sprinkle of oil over all as from the rose of a watering-pot. The constituents of the group might be changed, but the conversation trickled on. Lady Laura looked on with pride, brought up young Gulliver and younger Lord Woodleigh, most unsuitable objects, but who were at once oiled abundantly.

In this retirement, and waiting a promised vacancy in one of the Indian provinces, Sir Hopkins Pocock received unusual local honours. The maire and syndics called on him: he walked in a diplomatic cloud, and aired the Waipiti question for them. He kept his little diplomatic tools from rusting by practice in drawing-rooms and other places, putting on his Government House manner as if it were his uniform, and laying his head on one side in the Robin attitude, when any one was bold enough to utter a long sentence.

He often talked with Lady Laura over her son Charles. He had had a sort of liking for Charles when a boy, really surprising in one into whose system a bundle of despatches had got introduced instead of a heart. He had wished that he should be put to diplomacy, but at that time he had not made his Indian money, and his wishes naturally did not carry the weight with them they now did. Lady Laura often bitterly bewailed it to him. "We should have made an attaché of him, indeed we should," she said, penitently. "But I must say we never knew—poor Thornton and I—that you so wished it."

The diplomatist rubbed his fingers gleefully, perked his head on one side as if he were going to pick up caraway-seeds, and said:

"You were not wanted to know, my dear Laura; there was my policy, you see. One of my little secrets has been, *never seem* to want what you *do* want. Do you understand?"

Lady Laura was confounded at the discovery of this powerful engine; but she did not remark to him that it had broken down in that particular instance.

"However," continued he, "we shall get him a better profession—marry him off, when I am at Government House, in my Indian district. He shall come with me as secretary, aide-de-camp, or something of that sort. We shall get him a Rajah's daughter—a Nabob's child—with half a million of rupees. Leave it all to me."

Sir Hopkins came back to that subject often, and planned it minutely. Lady Laura welcomed it with delight, for Sir Hopkins had been too hopelessly abandoned to diplomacy to marry, and this really looked like adoption. She had often thought of her son's offering himself for marriage in the City, only that such a scheme, coming from her to him, would be hopeless. In the hands of a trained diplomatist, it was likely to have different results. Meanwhile, the refitting was going forward, and the diplomatist was getting on new sheathing, and being fresh riveted all through. Every day he sent away many letters, which he found a pleasure in ingeniously shaping as much like despatches as possible. He said he was "feeling his way," and, judging from the many times he wrote, the feeling must have been on a very extensive scale, and the way of enormous length.

It was now near the end of the season. The brave enduring mother had led her fair squadron, again and again, to the front, and, though unable to break the enemy's line, had never lost courage. Soon the daylight would be gone, and there would be no light left to fight by. To do them justice, they, too, did not falter, but came on again and again, being so well led. Yet it seemed all idle. The two youths had all the training of old Machiavellians. They were almost affectionate in their bearing—these young traitors. They gambolled about the premises like young dogs—ate in a friendly way off the family board at dinner and supper-time. They suffered themselves to be led about on brotherly terms. And yet, one day, young Gulliver, helping himself as he spoke to the family sherry, announced gaily to the girls a pleasant bit of news, at which they should all rejoice.

"Do you know," he said, "we're to be off in a few days. The governor's relented at last, and I am so glad. Woodleigh's been dying to go this age, and so have I. I can tell you, we're going to have a jolly time of it now. Do you know, we have been getting greatly bored here."

A ghastly smile showed the two girls' appreciation of the news. But Lady Laura had not forgotten to train their muscles, as she had all other points about them.

"How pleasant!" they said.

"Ain't it jolly?" said the youth. "I am counting the hours till we get off. Woodleigh's got an invitation to a house in Ireland filled with pretty girls—on draught—ha! ha!—and he's to take me! Jolly!"

The mother received the news of how the labour of months had been swept away—like an embankment by a violent storm—without even a twitch in her face.

"It is pleasant," she said, "getting away at this time. And when did they go? They would all miss them so." No one could have guessed the stab which this true Spartan felt at her heart.

For the first time, Lady Laura had begun to feel a sense of hopelessness, coupled with the idea that she was only rolling rocks up hills like a fashionable Sisyphus. Latterly, her mind had begun to travel over in the direction of her son Charles. She talked a good deal with the diplomatist on his schemes. "Leave it to me," said that wily negotiator. "I should like nothing better. I shall manage. But we must have no forcing it on, no eagerness. Old Governor Baines tried that with the Waipiti tribe, and we all know how it ended. He put on his blue and gold, and went down to them with a flourish. I said how it would be when I heard it. No, no, my good Laura, leave it to me."

"But couldn't we get him over here?" said Laura, anxiously. "At such a distance——"

"Now, *do* leave it to me," said Sir Hopkins; and for the present it was left to him.

The idea, however, took violent hold of Lady Laura Fermor. She began to turn from the three "hopeless and helpless" daughters, whom no labour, or pains, or propping, or "shoring up," could do anything for. She often thought, that if she herself had had but a quarter of such advantages, what splendid results would have been achieved. As it was, she had had to work for herself.

Yet they went through the old routine. They dressed and decorated themselves, and set out for the shows, and their faithful officer, with her old "hault courage," went with them.

On one of these occasions, the Préfet of the Hôtel de Ville was giving an entertainment—a high festival that had been talked

of for some weeks in advance. New ladies' uniforms had been ordered, and new flowers, and even new ladies' faces. The busy clink of armourers was heard on all sides. The girls, rallying a little, took on many hands, and laboured earnestly. Hope was the last of the virtues that was to flutter away from the little chambers in the Ponchettes.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

NEWS FROM HOME.

ON the night of the festival, the young ladies Fermor took a long while to dress. Lady Laura had finished her dressing early, as she always did, and her gaunt worn figure was hung with rich stuffs, just as they hang the aged stones of Temple-bar on a royal visit to the City. She was sitting waiting with her relation, dressed also, and they were both discussing Charles.

The English mail had been late, and was just brought in. A small despatch for the diplomatist, which he flung himself upon and tore with his talons; two or three ladylike letters for the family, in shape like enlarged visiting-cards. One was in Fermor's writing.

"A letter from Charles," said Lady Laura, with something like enthusiasm; "now we shall see what he is to do."

"Well," said Sir Hopkins, glancing over the letter he also had received, "that is so far satisfactory. Old Seymour is likely to go—to move on, as he should have done long ago. What did I tell you? I know how to deal with these sort of people. Well, what does Mr. Charles say?"

The answer was something like a scream. The tall gaunt woman, in all her finery, had fallen back on the sofa. For a moment he thought she was in a fit, but he was well accustomed to the Waipiti cries and war-dances. With true diplomatic instinct, he went over on tiptoe—for which there was no need—and closed the door softly. He was more alarmed about the letter, for he was sure that Charles was dying or dead.

The next moment she had started into a sort of galvanic life. "Think of it!" she said, "only think of him; it is dreadful, isn't it? Oh, that such a blow should come upon me!"

Sir Hopkins made attempts to secure the letter for his own reading, but she was brandishing it hysterically. "Gambled,"

thought the diplomatist. "The fellow has garbled, and lost every sixpence. Shan't pay a florin for him, though."

"Such a disgrace to bring on us all! He must be mad. Does he want to ruin us? What have we done to him that he should degrade us in this way? One blow after another! I am sure we had troubles enough of our own without *that!*"

Again the diplomatist tried ineffectually for the letter. "Married an innkeeper's daughter," he thought, bitterly. "A fool! I have done with him. Let me see what he writes, Laura."

"You know," she said, swaying herself back and forward, "what we reckoned on from him! You know how we talked, and what we were to make of him. Now that these girls have failed so wretchedly, he was the only thing we had to look to. And the air with which he writes it to me, as if he were getting a princess!"

"It is the innkeeper's daughter," thought the diplomatist; and she now let him take the letter. He got out his silver double glass, which hung about his neck like an amulet, and read it carefully.

It was our friend's skilful composition, breaking the news of his proceedings. It is plain that he had sadly miscalculated its effect. Carefully worded as it was, it had not made this raging mother and cold diplomatist see the thing in the light he fancied it would. He thought his words were sure to be as soothing as drops of camphor-julep. Poor Fermor! so much rhetoric expended like blank cartridges.

Lady Laura waited while the diplomatist read, her sunk flattened chest heaving outwards like a decayed wall about to fall in. Into her worn and faded cheek colour had actually forced its way, a visitor long estranged. Sir Hopkins read through Fermor's philosophical composition. The embossed and initialled document began:—



"MY DEAR MOTHER,—I wish to communicate a little matter, which I dare say may surprise you. Not that there is anything astonishing in what I am about to do, for it is a step which I and every man, who proposes seriously to take his proper station in the commonwealth, must eventually take. The idea, my

dear mother, of a long life spent selfishly in administering to oneself, in doing nothing for others, and, above all, the notion of leaving no more mark of one's path behind them than if it were made on the sea, this is what I never could *bear* to look forward to. I shrink from it, and always have shrunk from it. Your true gentleman will live for others as well as for himself, and will bequeath his name in trust to those who have a legitimate interest in guarding it free from speck or stain.

"In these views, I now merely write to say I am about to marry. Ordinary boys would, of course, dilate on the charms of the person they had chosen. I know you too well to indulge in rhapsodies of that kind. But this much I may say: she will be no discredit to our family. She is a Miss Manuel, of a half Spanish family. I think her charming; but she will make an excellent wife, which is the real point to look at. I do not enter into details now, as it is so late (or early, perhaps), but I lose no time in communicating to you news of this important step, which I almost *assume* you will approve of. You shall hear again to-morrow.

"Your affectionate Son,

"CHARLES FERMOR."

"Well?" said Lady Laura when he had done. "Is not this charming news? It is deplorable! But I give up. I can't go on any more. I am sick and weary of the whole business. Let them all do as they please—marry out of the street, if they will." And the veteran lady, utterly beaten and baffled, seemed to bend up and collapse physically, just as all her hopes had done already.

The diplomatist got to the end of the letter much relieved, yet there was a shade of disappointment on his face at his divination having broken down. The penetration that had pierced to the bottom of the savage nature of the Waipitis, was infallibly certain as to the innkeeper's daughter. He shook his head slowly at it, as if it were the water-trough of his cage, then laid his head on one side, then on the other.

"Stupid fellow!" he said at last, tranquilly; "I thought he had more sense."

"And what shall we say to him?" said Lady Laura, suddenly standing up, very fiercely. "Write to him and tell him never to come into my presence again? Tramp round, he and his low wife, from barrack to barrack until they starve! Not one

farthing shall he ever have from me again! And, Cousin Pocock, promise me that you will never let him have a sixpence of yours." For a dozen years back Lady Laura Fermor had never been so excited.

Sir Hopkins was smiling to himself all this while. An idea had struck him. His eyes twinkled. "Never see him again," he said. "We shall see him very often, I hope. No, no, things are not so bad. I don't take this gloomy view at all. A skilful negotiator would very soon restore the *status quo ante*."

"I don't want to restore anything," said Lady Laura. "You don't know him. He will never listen to reason——"

"Except to his own," said the diplomatist. "The most suitable disposition in the world for working on. I recollect the old Waipiti chief——"

"Yes, yes," said Lady Laura, a little impatiently. "I know that. But it will be no use. As a boy, he was the same; as a young man, he was the same; he will always be the same. Let him take his own way. They talk of those women that make the shirts; but what has my life been? All disappointments and trouble, crossed in every way. I can do nothing with any of them: and so I give it up now."

"That's the way with you women," said he, rubbing his hands, and looking into the stove; "you give up when we begin. This foolish Charles! Never mind, we shall see what can be done to-morrow. Ah! here we come at last!" and the girls came "swelling" in, like two yachts, with all their finery spread, and a maid coasting behind with a spare sail or so on her arm.

They did not notice their mother's shrunk and woful face; there were some final touches to be given. In the carriage she broke out with the story that night's mail had brought her. "Your brother is making a fine fool of himself! Go to somebody—I wish to Heaven you would—and leave me here. I am tired of you all. I am sick of the world. I have done what I could for you. Only let him write me one of his hypocritical letters when he wants money! I, that have always scraped, and pinched, and denied myself, to keep him up in his proper station!"

It was a dismal progress in that dark carriage. The girls had been a little excited by the hope of this party, though indeed, by this time, it should have been monotonous. This news came on them with a chill. Their hearts felt tight even under the stiff silk armour, which the maid Jane had tightened with many

struggles. Suddenly came the lights and the music of the "dance," seen and heard through the open drawing-room. As though a fashionable sergeant had called out "Attention!" they fell into regular line, fans were "ordered," smiles and general happiness mounted to their faces; they bent and swayed, shook kid-covered hands, were so glad, and so sorry, and alarmed at being late; and were so smiling and delighted, that the idea was conveyed that by impediments they had been kept away from this delicious retreat, and had at last given their jailers the slip. They had put on their smiles with their gloves. The ugly family nightmare—just heard of—they thrust down, though it would fly open at times in the midst of a valse, like a jack-in-the-box. Lady Laura Fermor "taken down" for an ice by Mr. Monkhouse, M.P., who was getting his chest "shored up" at Nice, was rallied by her in the gayest manner, on a rumour of marriage. He was a tall, florid bachelor, very red, and much tightened about the throat, and, as he looked at her sideways with relish and admiration, his collar and necktie seemed to fit about his throat as a frill of paper does about a ham. In one of her laughs of appreciation the box flew open, and the sight of the "jack" almost sobered her, but she had it wired down in a second.

So, too, with her daughters. They ambled round in a galop and valse: the elder in the arms of a "delightful French officer," with a figure like an hour-glass. So with her sister, who did a little quiet unostentatious work with a young English gentleman. They went apart from the world, and opened a little "store" in a greenhouse among the plants. Stupid single men who knew nobody, blundered on them here—in the desert, as it were—and hastily retreated.

It came to the end when Lady Laura sounded the "rappel." Then came the gush of farewell smiles, general delight and grief: an evening to look back to. Mr. Monkhouse, M.P., took out Lady Laura, and looked fondly after her out of his paper ham frill, as she drove away. She shook her fan at him with gay menace. But as he was in the supper-room telling Fobley what "a fine woman" he had just taken out, all the springs had relaxed, and the "fine woman's" face had sunk, and dropped, and fallen into hollows. Not a word was spoken during that mourning-coach progress.

That very night, before she went to bed (a form she went through from mere habit), Lady Laura got out her desk and wrote to her son all in fact that had passed through her mind

that night. He was to take his own way—ruin himself if he pleased, ruin them, ruin everybody. By all means take his own way. She was sick of the whole business. God knows, she had had a weary time of it with the whole set. However, this she begged, that he would never again trouble her by letter or otherwise. She then read it over with satisfaction, as though she were delivering it to him in person. In the morning, when Sir Hopkins came, she took him aside privately, and showed it. "There," she said, "it will be a satisfaction to my mind to have sent him that."

He read it smiling, sat down, talked to her a good hour, talked of the Waipiti now and then, and finally wrote a short note, which she copied. Hers lay in pieces under the English grate. It ran—

"Nice.

"MY DEAR CHARLES,—Your letter was indeed a surprise. I hope you have not been a little hasty. However, if you are irretrievably committed, you must of course go through with it. You shall see us before long, as the air of this place somehow does not suit Alicia Mary. I shall let you know when we shall be in London, where I hope you will try and meet us.

"Your affectionate Mother,

"LAURA FERMOR."

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

AN INVITATION.

THE lectures on Roger le Garçon were suspended by more absorbing matter. His head was full of the incidents of his new dignity; every one was carrying up, as it were, Addresses to the Throne, and he had to deliver Gracious Replies. His hands, too, were full enough, and he was very busy in the mornings writing prettily-turned notes to many acquaintance, male and female, and the turn was sometimes sad, sometimes humorous. "You will be concerned, dear Mrs. Fazakerly," he wrote, "to hear of my approaching dissolution." Which little metaphor was worked pleasantly to the bottom of the first page. "You have always, dear Miss Biddulph, felt such an interest in anything that concerns my happiness, I cannot let a post go by

without," &c. This was the serious and plaintive style. After all, there was something exciting in being married.

He was busy in this way one morning, some ten days after Major Carter's party, when his door was opened, and his cast-iron neighbour swung in—as a crane swings round—close on the servant, who would have announced him. "Sit down, Mr. Carlay, said Fermor, affably; "I am glad to see you."

"And I am glad to hear you say so," said the other. "I was thinking something might have been done to offend you."

"Dear no!" said Fermor, gravely. "I hope there has been nothing in my conduct which a gentleman would not sanction. Oh! you are thinking of my unexplained absence? I see! Ah, there were reasons for that. I must tell you," continued he, with something like a simper. "By the way, Miss Carlay—I hope she is improving?"

"Better, thank you," said the other, rising suddenly. "I am not a man for seeing the world, or for managing it, and have no wish to learn how; therefore, if I do things in a rough abrupt fashion of my own, you must excuse me."

"Certainly, certainly," said Fermor. "Now I have knocked about the world a pretty good time, and am used to that kind of thing."

"Because, if you would not mind taking us as we are, in the backwoods, as I may say, and putting up *with* roughness—in short, would you dine with us to-day?"

Fermor started. This was a true surprise. But in a moment he saw the secret springs that were working. It was very, very odd. This was always to be the result of his presence. He had not intended to be *more* than gentlemanly—his common manner—he had not, indeed. Could he help it? Of a sudden he became gracious and courtly. He would have the *greatest* pleasure. He really liked that sort of thing, no fuss, or state; "provided," added Fermor, "you treat me as—one of the family, mind. There, at the mess, they have got a Frenchman, who lived with Count Walewski. I believe, in his own line, he is worth his weight in gold; but, on my word and honour," Fermor added, earnestly, "I would sooner sit down to a mutton-chop—a well-done mutton-chop—and a pint of sherry, than a dozen courses of his ragouts."

With this little profession of faith, which he threw in gratuitously, he sent away his visitor. During the day he thought pleasantly over the prospect, and laid out how he would amuse them by some new phenomena of his personality. He dressed

himself with effect, set a freshly-pulled gentleman's bouquet in his coat, and at the fixed hour he and his *to éyw* ascended the stairs together, and were announced.

He was astonished to see what an elegant looking room it was, and to find that the furniture was not of rude cast-iron, nor of unhewn wood. Miss Carlay was there, but not, as in the garden, propped up with pillows. Almost as soon as he had shaken hands, Fermor had started with his graceful garrulity.

"I can see a marked improvement," he said. "I am not at all surprised. The doctors, you know, are beginning to send people here. I find myself better. I am one of those people that feel every breath of air. In fact, I am an animated barometer, a human aneroid." As soon as he entered, Mr. Carlay, in a grim dinner coat cut out of sheet-iron, and new black trousers, like short lengths of an iron water-main, had drawn off, and was walking up and down at the other end of the room. In Miss Carlay a faint tinge of colour, and the manner which is peculiar to delicacy, made her appear very interesting to Fermor.

They went down to dinner. A small round table, a little graceful silver, a little glass, as graceful in shape and pattern, and flowers. No iron ore, as Fermor had almost expected. It was surprising. Everything was good, and tasteful, and hot; with claret too, Fermor's favourite wine. He was much pleased, became much surprised, and to reward them put spurs to the *to éyw*. Now was the time—they should share in his good fortune. "By the way," he said, "I have a little bit of news, which I dare say will take you by surprise. Perhaps it is no news, and perhaps you have heard it; and perhaps, again, it is scarcely worth the name of news, and you would not care to hear it." He waited for deserved applause for this ingenious way of putting the thing, and got it. The young lady welcomed everything he said; not indeed with words, but with silence, which to him was golden, and, therefore, far better.

"Did you not hear? They are going to marry me!" he said, looking round and smiling.

Mr. Carlay gave a grim and sudden jerk, which in another would have been a start. Fermor, who had his eye on the daughter, saw, to his real astonishment, a flutter—not a start—and colour.

"Yes," said Fermor, speaking of himself as of another person, and as if he were helpless in the hands of some one else. "The thing, I believe, is appointed for everyone, like death—it is only

a question of time. My dissolution has been coming on gradually: so I only wrap my robe gracefully about my head, and fall down pierced with many wounds. Of course I should be glad, and yet I feel sorry. I should like it to be delayed a little—perhaps not to come off at all. She is charming, and too good for me: but who can tell how these things turn out? It is quite a lottery—all a lottery." This gracious apology—so considerably made—seemed to do little good.

But he could not but observe the confusion his sudden news had caused. Miss Carlay's eyes were on her plate, and she was making a pretence of eating very fast. For the rest of the time she scarcely spoke at all, and very early fled away. Her father rolled his eyes grimly, and gave out a word now and again, like the sound of rusty machinery in motion. But Fermor, in great spirits, let his talk whirl round like the fly-wheel of an engine. He told afterwards he never had such a dreadful duty cast on him as the struggling against the sense of that oppressive man, who would *not* talk. "I might, as well have been in a room by myself," he said to Young Brett, "speaking to the épergne. Such a moody soul as it was." Finally, Mr. Carlay pushed back his chair roughly, and got up.

"Ah, join the ladies," said Fermor, "or lady, eh?"

"We have ways of our own here," said the other, standing at the door, "We are early persons. We do not join the ladies, or carry out that sort of thing. My daughter is not nearly strong enough, so you will excuse us, please."

In fact, at that moment a maid came down with a message. Miss Carlay was not very well, and could not appear again. "You see," said Mr. Carlay, now in the hall. "We are not suited for company and its forms, and must take our chance of being considered behind the times. So——"

He had opened the hall door. Fermor felt himself, in fact, morally taken by the shoulders and put out. He went down the steps chafing. "This is but the usual thing," he said. "I own I deserve it. This comes of going down into a lower rank. And really," he added, with a wounded air, to himself, "after all I said, and the way I exerted myself——" Still, it was a grateful subject to think how oddly the news of his "happiness" had been received. That poor, soft, good-natured girl—it did seem as if it had overwhelmed her. As for her father, he was a common ploughman. In fact, he would go in and see her in the morning, encourage her, smooth her soft hair (morally speaking), and console her.

The next morning, which was sunny and without a breath of

air abroad, he looked out from his back window. The usual picture was not to be seen: neither the young girl, nor the arm-chair, nor the pillows, nor the maid holding the parasol like an Indian servant. Later in the day, he set his decorators and upholsterers to work, fitted himself up with great nicety, and went in to call. He had not lectured on Roger le Garçon for a long time.

"Miss Carlay in?" he said, almost passing the servant, as a matter of course. But he was told bluntly "No." (This maid was not of the class who thought him "a lovely young man.") He retired much disgusted, and took down all his fine hangings and upholstery. Two days after he called again, feeling a strange longing to say something on Roger le Garçon, but again was not admitted. Yet he had seen the young girl in the garden that morning. He was furious. It was all that low engine-driver, stoker, ploughman—that anything—her father. That poor soft girl was tyrannised over, and could not resist. However, now he had a fair excuse for "cutting the whole concern—tout la boutique." The course on Roger le Garçon was suspended, and the lecturer himself "interdicted." He had, however, laid out for himself the pleasant pastime of "forming Violet's mind." With this view, he used to converse with her a good deal upon the phenomenon of his *own* mind. In this department of psychology he was very fluent. Violet, in a devotee attitude, with her soft eyes fixed on her master, tried hard to follow, and, curious to say, her lecturer seemed better pleased when he could *not* be followed than when he was suddenly halted and eagerly shown that he was understood. He did not, however, include the rest of the family in his lectures.

From the very first day after Major Carter's party, he had suddenly drawn the line, as he called it, and erected strong barriers between the rest of the family and himself. "Though I take the daughter," he said, "I do not, on that account, marry the whole family. She is absorbed into ours. I don't want her to bring *them* with her. No! no!" And to her he said privately, "My dear Violet, you are charming, as of course, and what I think of you, I have shown. But I must really protest against your relations—that is, against taking them *en masse*. It may be very well now, but I do sincerely hope they may be got to understand the footing I desire to have them on. Now I must say, coming home the other day and finding them all in a carriage at the door, and that wild brother of yours in the hall——"

"Indeed," interrupted Violet, piteously (she somehow never

could gain courage to call him Charles, and therefore never called him by *any* name), "*indeed* they meant it well, and Pauline and Louis were against it, but mamma said you would think it so rude if they did not call on you."

"And why," said Fermor, with a curious want of logic, "should they be so violent against so common an act of courtesy? To tell you the truth, my dear Violet, I don't like your brother, and you must not be angry with me for telling you."

"Oh no, no," said Violet.

"I can't help it, and I can't give a distinct reason for it, no more than I can for not liking cucumbers or beef, or any other of the strong things. *He* is the cucumber of your family," he added, smiling, and wishing to reward her attention by the present of a little jest. She laughed and enjoyed it, as she enjoyed everything he meant to be enjoyed.

"Now," said he, "suppose we go back to lessons." That is, to the personal psychology. He turned on a little jet, and the personal experiences began to flow on steadily.

"Many people say I have a cold manner, and further think, *because* I have a cold manner, I must be cold. Does it follow? The fact is, I don't care to be enthusiastic, at least not about everything. It is not my nature, and yet—perhaps it may be. Perhaps I feel that if I were to give way to it I would become all enthusiasm, and froth away like a bottle of champagne left open accidentally. Very strange. Now, what would *you* say?"

A dreadfully embarrassing question for the shy little witness under examination. And, indeed, any expert even would have found it hard to have extracted any plain positive theory out of Captain Fermor's contradictory speculation. Most likely he did not wish her, for he shook his head over her, smiling.

"No, no," he said. "It is not every one that can follow me. I am like a Chaldee manuscript. It would take years of patient labour to find the key." And so, with a hailstorm of "I, I, I," the personal narrative flowed on for twenty minutes more. Violet listened with soft and dilated eyes, trying hard to keep up with his broader stride, and, to say the truth, was a little fatigued. But all this while we can understand how her mind was being "formed."

Young Brett, that good boy, had been in and out with him all through—the most faithful of faithful terriers. Fermor really began to like him, and actually once or twice shifted a dreadfully sarcastic "snub" on to the head of his own man. With a little adaptation it did just as well. Young Brett had been up and

down to Town with mystery and meaning, and finally burst upon Fermor with a superb fire-arm, breech-loading, silver mounted, with needle and the rest of it—reposing, too, in a luxurious couch of green velvet, where it would be exceedingly warm during the winter nights. Poor child, he had the Indian notion about a weapon of this sort, and would have given all the skins, furs, and cowries he was worth for a rifle and powder and shot, considering that human happiness, riches, comfort, and amusement, lay packed in a gun-case.

Fermor received this marriage offering in a very kindly manner, turning it over graciously—after a short inspection, ringing for his man to take it away into his bedroom. This was very much from him. For presents *were* one of his grievances. "People encumber you with them," he said, in one of his comic pocket definitions, "something you do not want, to be repaid by something you cannot afford. That is *my* idea," he said.

But he took Little Brett with him, as it were upon his staff, to see the Manuels pretty often, and sent that honest boy to them as often, when he was not in the vein to go himself. The family liked the sight of his white hair and his free speech. He secretly admired both, more particularly the elder girl, who was "splendid, by Jove!" He would have liked to have given her a gun. He saw they liked hearing about Fermor, and "rattled" away vivaciously on that pleasant theme. He spoke of him always with the deepest reverence and pride. "I believe," he said, "I am about the only fellow he likes among them all. He never told me so, but I *think* so. Oh, he is wonderful! *such* knowledge of the world, such quietness, such ease. I would give *anything*" (the image of his favourite breech-loader rising before him) "to have something like it! He says it is training; that he has trained himself. Oh, it is wonderful! He can do what he likes with people," he went on. "There is an old cynic next door to him, with a daughter—I should be afraid to look at him with an opera-glass. But he has got round *him*: has the run of the house, I may say. Oh, it is wonderful!"

The girls became interested. These were the times of the lectures upon Roger le Garçon.

"And who are these people?" said Pauline.

"Oh, a fellow like a tall schoolmaster. I know he scared me out of all my senses. But Fermor knows how to tame every one. He made Fermor dine with him the other day."

"And the daughter?" said Violet, anxiously.

"A nice soft creature, that sits in a chair," said Young Brett,*

rapturously, as if this last attitude were one of her virtues; "so delicate and gentle, and, by Jove! so grateful when Fermor goes in to see her. He does it very often," continued Young Brett, with great seriousness; "out of charity, like visiting the hospitals, he says."

Pauline, glancing nervously at her sister, changed the subject, by asking Young Brett how he liked his new gun; and presently Violet, making some vain attempts at doing her work, got up with an impetuous rustle, and fled to her room. Her sister knew these signs of trouble.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, Pauline found her in sore distress, with two red rims round her bright eyes. "Oh, child, child!" said she. "I knew you would be fretting yourself with these trifles."

"I *am* a child," said the other, bursting out afresh, "and I can't help it. And *he* knows it, and treats me like one. Oh, Pauline, you were wise and I was foolish. He just thinks of me as he would of his little dog—just to amuse him for half an hour. Oh, I am beginning to be very miserable."

And there was anguish and despair, and the good sister applied the usual soothing lotions, and tranquillised her, as she alone had the power of doing, with the weak liniment of reason.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

A LITTLE HEART IN TROUBLE.

LATE in the afternoon arrived Fermor the Splendid. He came to "form her mind." He noted the faint red rings and the remains of the dejection. He was soothing and gallant, and encouraging. He comforted and petted with his noble and silvery accents. Her little soul was burning in her to bring him gently to account, but she stood too much in awe of him, and shrank into low spirits. He freezed down any hysterics in a second.

"A little frowardness," he thought. "Upon my word, I am sorry to see this. I must eradicate it gently but firmly. Violet," he said, gravely, "you are not in your usual spirits to-day, I fancy. No! You can't conceal anything from me. Somebody has put you out a little."

"No, no," said Violet, eagerly.

"My dear child, it is written there," he said, pointing to her face, "in text-hand. It is a great pity to be put out by trifles, for in *your* little round of life *you* can only encounter trifles. Now, take me. In the larger tract of life through which *I* have to walk, what purgatory *I* should suffer if I let myself be disturbed. I might as well give up. Things must master me, or I must master things. I prefer the latter. You should make an exertion, Violet, and it will come after a time."

Violet cast down her eyes, trembling a little.

"How will you face the world?" said Fermor. "How will you rough it? for rough it we must, to a certain degree. Or I must rough it for both, I suppose," said Fermor, resignedly. "It will all come on my shoulders."

"Oh!" said Violet, sorrowfully, "I would not mind—that is, I would do—I mean—anything, if I only thought—that is——"

"Well?" said he, pausing. "Well? I do not quite follow. Your English, Violet, is rather unconnected. You should try and throw your words into the form of a sentence."

"But when——" began Violet, passionately; then stopped short, a little scared.

"Yes?" said Fermor, quite calmly, who thought, as he walked home, how he had played her skilfully, like a little perch at the end of his line. "Let us hear it."

"Oh, if I thought," said she again, becoming passionate, "that you really cared for me, and loved me! But you don't. No, you don't. Do you? Tell me, now. Do you?"

Fermor was secretly pleased. She looked really beautiful at that moment. Her cheeks were glowing, her eyes glistening, as if a shower were about to fall, and there was an imploring air about her, an acknowledgment of superior power, and an entreaty for mercy.

"My poor child," said Fermor, very tenderly, "what have you got into your little head? Something foreign, I know. Come, tell me. I am not to be taken in, you know. *Of course* I like you," he added, graciously.

"And nobody else? Do you like nobody else?" she said, plaiting the corner of her dress like a little girl stopped and questioned in the street.

"No one else?" said Fermor, a little surprised. "Why, of course not; at least, not in the same degree. These are very odd questions."

"I know, I know," she said, eagerly, "and I should not speak in this way. But you are so run after, and are so clever, it is

only natural people should ask you into their houses, and listen to you—and—sit with them—in the *hospitals*—whereas I am so foolish and so little sought, I have only *one* person to look to. I think of——”

The clouds on Fermor's face drifted away to the right and left. The sun came out.

“You little, absurd child,” he said, with gracious vituperation. “So *that* is what you are coming to. Because I go in and see a dull old gentleman and a sick girl? Some of the gossips have been entertaining you, eh?”

Violet hung down her head and said nothing.

“And you have been inflaming your little jealous wits with their stories. Now, if I had not luckily hit on the true state of things, we should have had a combustion and explosion, perhaps, and possibly,” Fermor added, with a climax, “a—a scene! As for having a special Act of Parliament passed forbidding conversation with ladies, or having a portable wall built round me,” continued Fermor, with great humour, “and a sunk fence too wide to be jumped across by young girls, these things, my dear Violet, are not to be thought of in the nineteenth century. Even if they were, they would be absurd.”

Violet smiled, not through tears, but through that little mist which was before her bright eyes.

“You *know*,” she said, repeating her one idea, “you are so superior to me, and know the world *so* deeply, and *so* wonderfully. Still, as a favour to me, if you only *would*——”

“Put up the wall?” said Fermor, gaily, and with smiling encouragement. “Well, it *is* up. Consider it up from this moment. There!”

Overpowered by this generosity in impromptu masonry, Violet humbled herself at her lord's feet, and he raised her good naturedly; and thus, in general effusions, and with fireworks and catherine-wheels flying round, the scene closed in.

But that little heart was restless and troubled; she was scarcely satisfied with the magnificent explanation and the metaphors of the stone wall and Acts of Parliament. Her instinct pierced through all the disguises of “sick girl,” “charity,” “hospital,” and the rest of it. If a “sick girl,” perhaps an interesting girl, and charity was terribly akin to warmer feelings. So, when her grand caliph was gone, she gave way to the gloomiest despondency. She was miserable, and there was no happiness on the wide earth.

She knew Fermor was gone down to the barracks “to be

made a machine of," as he put it drolly, and she knew where Brown's-terrace was. She presently got on her bonnet, the bonnet with the red flower, and that seemed to be made of spiders' webs, and with her little face full of care, tripped away in a guilty sort of fashion.

At Brown's-terrace she passed hurriedly before the house, scarcely venturing to look at it; then came back, reconnoitring it softly like a vidette. Gradually growing bolder, she got courage for a steady look at the drawing-room windows on each side. She went away, took a short walk, and came back timorously, and then saw at one of the windows a girl in an invalid's attitude, with a book which she had been reading on her lap; and this girl she saw in a second was *not* "a sick girl" in the sense described, but a very soft and interesting "delicate" creature.

The colour came to her cheeks again, as, indeed, it did very often in the course of a day. She was *indeed* plunged into misery. She was thinking how it was now practically "all over," when she heard Young Brett's voice close beside her, telling her that she would be sure to find Fermor out now, but that if she had any message he would run up to the barracks for him. He was at that moment full of the good nature which is troublesome. Should he knock at the door and see had he by any chance come in? Very likely he would have called at the Carlay's next door, with whom he was "always in and out." By the way, look! there was Miss Carlay in the window, and it was a great pity she was so delicate, was it not?

Violet, thinking she was now fairly embarked in diplomacy, thought timorously how she would examine this boyish witness. "But he never sees these people—latterly, I mean," she said. "I think he said he had given them up."

Young Brett laughed with all the boisterous scorn of superior knowledge. "Not he," he said; "they are great friends. He is the best, kindest fellow in the world. He gives up hours of his time to sitting with that poor, pretty invalid. There!" he said triumphantly, "there's her father?" And the grim figure stalked down the steps, shut to what was almost part of his flesh and blood—the iron gate—opened the gate next door, and stalked up Fermor's steps.

In hopeless confusion she returned home, and spent a troubled night. Poor soul! she was a child, as Fermor had told her, and she tried hard to comfort herself with his assurance about the stone wall and the sunk fence. Though she knew so little of

the world, she had her hurricanes in a Sèvres teacup, and a whole view of the whole world in a stereoscope.

When Fermor reached home, he found a letter and a piece of news waiting for him. The letter was from Lady Laura Fermor, and his forehead contracted as he looked at it. The piece of news was that Mr. Carlay had called, and his brow cleared again. "On his knees, it seems," he said, gaily. Before he had been in ten minutes, the human casting was stalking into his room once more. Fermor fetched out his coat of supreme indifference, and got into it as into a paletot.

"I ~~was~~ here before—to-day," said the other. "You were out, it seems."

Fermor shrugged his shoulders, and the shoulders seemed to say in their own language, "Was our master obliged to wait at home? or to be in always, on the chance of *your* honouring us with a visit?"

"You have been busy all this week past," continued Mr. Carlay. "Your time has been taken up, I presume?"

"I generally contrive that it shall be," said Fermor, carelessly. "I have generally to compress two days' work into one. I like to be busy." This was the idea in his mind, but in reality he never had any of that trouble of compression. "Well," he continued, with a smile.

The other looked at him steadfastly. "I think," he said, "what has once been begun might as well go on. If one man cares to see another, and has been seeing another for a time, it seems unmeaning that he should suddenly break off without reason. Life is not to be a series of spasms. What have we done?"

Fermor followed him perfectly. "Of course not," he said. "I hope Miss Carlay is better to-day?"

Mr. Carlay rose a little hastily. "I don't know," he said, with really something like agitation; "she *was* better, and I thought she was mending. I am too gloomy company. But what can I do? No one naturally cares to come to our house, and I have not the knack of giving a cheerful welcome; perhaps contrive to offend, besides. I don't mean it, God knows I don't."

"You should cheer her up," said Fermor, gaily.

"I!" said Mr. Carlay, grimly showing his teeth; then, with an almost painful effort to give flexibility to the iron about his face, "Ah! if you *would* be kind enough to look in at some spare time, and talk a little to her as people of the world do. She likes it, I think, and I have long since lost the trick."

Fermor smiled : first at the notion of his calling genius a trick ; secondly, at the notion of *his* ever having had it. But the flavour of the homage in the whole transaction was so welcome, that the message from the throne came couched in the most gracious terms.

"Would Miss Carlay be able to see people to-morrow?" he said, as if a new id  a had occurred suddenly to him. "Any rate, I will take my chance. I have just got some of Hachette's new things I should like to show her" (*i.e.* lecture upon).

Then Mr. Carlay went his way ; and Fermor, stretching himself like a minister who had just given an audience, began to open his mail of letters. There were the usual elements—a circular, a bill, an application to be steward at the dinner for Charwomen's Orphans, and the domestic letter. They all received speedy and decent burial in a waste-paper basket under the table, with the exception of Lady Laura's. It was headed "London, Duke's Hotel, Dover-street," which startled him a little, and ran :—

"MY DEAR CHARLES,—We are all arrived here safely, after a dreadful journey, which has turned Alicia and Blanche into perfect wrecks. We shall rest here until to-morrow, when we shall set off for Eastport. We are all in a fever of curiosity to see the new girl you have chosen. At least, they are ; for I, at this very moment, have a perfect idea of her before me. I always agreed with you in liking those high-bred, tall, classical creatures, cold in their manner, and as well trained to society as soldiers. You are a little cold yourself, my dear Charles, and run a little into the extreme. But it is *de rigueur* in a woman. Our relative, Pocock, is coming with us, and in his way is, I suspect, *as curious* as the girls. She must be careful before him, my dear Charles, for, *entre nous*, he knows men and women like his spelling-book. You will have apartments looked out for us in a genteel situation, three bedrooms, a sitting-room, and a parlour.

"Believe me, your affectionate Mother,

"LAURA FERMOR."

He was chafed and "put out" by this letter. "Why should she take all *that* into her head?" he said. "Does she suppose I am to marry a stalactite? Not one of them *ever* understood me. Women always take you literally in everything you say. Now, we shall have a regular exhibition, and I shall have them

all staring with eye-glasses at my show." He got up disgusted and walked about. "I knew they would be making a fuss I had an instinct of it. Coming over this way, in a mob! Really intolerable!" And he walked round and round with angry protest. "And *she*," he said, with a stamp, "to be 'cold,' and exhibit training indeed!" He was now at the very pinnacle of disgust, but at the same time he felt a sudden uncomfortable chill as he thought of how "the girl he had chosen" was *not* cold, and would behave with rustic warmth among these cold inquirers.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

PRESENTED TO THE FERMOR FAMILY

NEXT morning he was with the Manuels very early, and with a grave face demanded a private interview with Violet. "My relations," he said to her, "are to be here to-morrow, and desire that you should be presented to them. As I need not impress on you how much depends on the first effect you produce on them, I have come to recommend you to be most *careful how you behave*."

When she heard this terrible news, Violet felt a shock. She had all along anticipated this dreadful ceremonial, and her little heart fluttered as if she had got a summons to the fashionable Council of Ten. If she had known of that fearful tribunal, she would, perhaps, have preferred it. She felt all "blankness;" and her little heart sank inwards.

"Now," said Fermor, become suddenly like her spiritual adviser, "this is a more serious thing than you would perhaps imagine. Sit down here, Violet." And he got her a chair, in which she placed herself, trembling, as if it were a dentist's. "You have not seen so much life," he went on, "and have been brought up differently. *They* have lived and had their being in the highest classes. Fashion is as the air they breathe. Naturally they are nice and critical, and have a different order of associations. They are very curious to see how you will behave, and how you will turn out; and the question is, how *will* you behave, and how will you turn out? Now give me an idea."

Violet, who never thought how she would behave before any one in the world, and whose instinct in "acting" was her own

simple heart, looked up wistfully at the dentist standing beside her, and said, sadly, "Oh, how *can* I? I don't—know."

"Oh," said he, gravely, "but we must *try* and know. I am sorry to see you don't appreciate how much depends on all this; you do not, indeed, Violet. I am really nervous about it myself; for there is a—a—and I would not say this to you, but for the gravity of the situation—a lightness, if I may call it, in your manner, a sort of rusticity, which I know would jar on persons brought up as they have been. *This* is the rock I dread for you."

Poor Violet! whose voyaging had been a graceful pleasure-yacht in the sun and the smoothest of seas, to hear now of "rocks!" In sore affliction she did not know how to answer.

"Take time," said Fermor, gravely.

"Oh," she suggested, after a pause, and raising her eyes to him timorously, "I think if I were to be natural, you know—just myself——"

She stopped, for Fermor started back in alarm.

"Good gracious! no! Not for worlds! Oh, I see, it is very hard to get you to understand. You have not been trained to think, and it is scarcely your fault. I see how it must end. So we must try and pull through as best we can." And having, as it were, extracted the tooth, with a hopeless air he prepared to go.

Seeing his resignation, and not knowing what to do, she ran to him helplessly. "Oh," she said, "if you would only tell me—teach me."

"Oh no," said Fermor, still resigned. "I have never found *that* to do. No, we must trust, as you say, to nature. Only I beg, I entreat—at least no spirits, no violent bursts of laughter. I know it seems bad to tell you this, but it is all for your own good."

Poor Violet! Bursts of laughter before *them*!

Fermor good-naturedly made allowance, as for a child, and she saw this idea plainly in his face. He left her miserable; and then the idea of what had since passed out of her head—the "invalid girl"—came back. "She is not a child," she thought, "and can understand his instructions; and he respects her." Then with a weight of worldly trial pressing on her little brain, she went away to her room, and battened on her new-found miseries. This, we may say, was, on the whole, the most gloomy day of her little life. Towards evening, she asked her sister to come and take a walk. From her she received balm. They

walked towards Brown's-terrace. "If you torment yourself in this way, my poor child," Pauline said, "you will fret yourself into a grave. They live next door to him, and a little civility is only natural. Besides, he has told you that he has found them out to be low people, and has given them up."

"Yes," said Violet, half convinced, "I suppose so—I suppose he has."

They were entering the terrace, when she drew Pauline back suddenly. "There he is," she said hurriedly.

"Well," said Pauline, "we are not afraid to meet him? Ah! you doubting creature, you deserve punishment! Don't you see he is setting out for our house. Come!"

"No—not now—at least, not for a moment."

Fermor was coming out of his house, magnificent as a decorated Apollo Belvidere. He was smoothed, and brushed, and polished, and wore virgin gloves of the most delicate grey in the world; and the delicate grey fingers were closed delicately upon a packet of yellow-toned pamphlets—new works of the well-known Roger le Garçon school. In his button-hole he had a fresh flower. He passed out of his own gate—looked up the road which led in the Manuel direction—then opened the next gate, went up the steps, and gave a dainty knock as if he were doing "a shake" upon the piano. Pauline, always ready with assuring doctrine, had not a word to say. Not in pale grey gloves, and with a flower at its button-hole, does the charitable Misericordia society visit its sick. Brother Fermor's "habit" was scarcely spiritual enough.

But they had to think of other things. There was the Day of Execution fixed for the morrow, the awful presentation to the Queen-Mother. Violet, agitated by her new troubles, scarcely slept that night, but tossed and rocked as if she were on the waves of a real ocean. The utter wreck of a night's rest is not much loss for a young girl; but, looking in the glass, which she did anxiously as soon as she had set foot upon land, she saw red rings round her eyes, and flushed spots upon her cheeks.

The great domed black boxes of "Lady Laura Fermor and suite," each with a coronet at the hasps, and wrapped carefully in a canvas paletot, had come down into Eastport, and had been got up-stairs into the genteel lodgings. The suite resolved itself into one single maid, who was delighted to get home again from what she called "Knees" (but which was spelt "Nice"); and professed her delight at finding herself once more at home in "a Christian country."

Fermor had been with them early on the morning of their arrival, and had been encircled by cold arms. He was a little nervous, though he did not acknowledge it to himself. The girls welcomed him with the artificial blandishments of fashionable affection, and talked to him and put questions as if company were by, and he was Colonel Silvertop of the Grenadier Guards. They felt that this was acting, and they felt, too, the absurdity of it, but could not help it. Their voices *would* fall into the ball-room cadence.

"We are dying to see her;" they always called Violet *her*. "I am sure she is like Lady Mantower's girl, you used to admire so much." This was Alicia Mary's speech.

"You must make up your minds, my dears, to be frights near her. Even as a boy, Charles, you were the most difficle person in taste. She shall go out with us in Town, all jewels and lace, and the richest dresses. I like those stately, queen-like creatures."

"Yes, mamma, and she can take us to court, and we shall walk behind her, every one asking who that magnificent woman is?"

With his mouth expressing sourness, and some impatience in his tone, Fermor broke in: "I don't understand," he said, "you run on so fast. As for being a stately creature, and that sort of thing, she is a very nice unassuming girl; and as for those fine dresses and drawing-rooms, we shall be too poor, God knows, to be thinking of such things. I couldn't afford it."

"I hope not," said Lady Laura, gravely. "No plebeian saving and scraping, I hope. Making a handsome show is not so dear a thing after all; and that ten or fifteen thousand pounds, for we are disputing how much it was you told us——"

"Ten, mamma," said Blanche.

"What do you all mean?" said Fermor, turning very red. "Who was talking of ten or fifteen thousand pounds? I wasn't. If you mean Violet's fortune, she has next to nothing; and," he added, with an attempt at generous emotion, "and thank God she doesn't require it."

Lady Laura almost screamed. "This is quite news! Well, be it ten, or nine, or eleven, you must make a show on it if you wish to get on. It is very little, my dear Charles; for your father always said you would want plenty of money to keep you alive."

"But," said Fermor, bluntly, "we had better understand this once for all. I am not one of your mercenary people. From the first, I said I never would look out for money. In

fact, it always seemed to me a—a sort of drawback, a kind of manufacturing thing. What I wanted was a person who would suit me exactly, and I at last succeeded in finding her. Violet, I believe," he added, looking round with a sort of pride, "will not have a sixpence of her own—literally, not a sixpence."

The family looked from one to the other, with a blankness mingled with contempt. Fermor saw their glances, and became aggressive.

"Ah! you," he said, "who naturally think the whole of life to be one long ball——"

"Hush!" said Lady Laura, calmly; "don't reproach *them*. You have not, I hope, let these people take you in? I am sure you are too sensible for that."

"Who says so?" said Fermor, sharply. "Perhaps that will be the next thing."

"Well," said Lady Laura, "you are old enough now to know what is best for yourself. I tried to bring you up as well as I could to a certain age. The thing must go on now, and we must make the best of it. What time," added she, calmly, "are we to see your Miss Manuel?"

"Oh," said Fermor, constrainedly, "don't put yourself out. Any time to-morrow."

"You said to-day, I thought," said Lady Laura, coldly, and rising. "Now, my dears, we must get our things settled in this place. We have plenty to do. We shall be in all to-day, for I feel very tired."

Fermor went home chafing. "What a way they take things!" he said to himself. "Why should they be expecting this and that? I am sure I am old enough now to take my own course." But what really jarred was their resigned air of toleration; for he had expected banners, and bonfires, and acclamations, and general jubilee.

He arrived at Raglan-terrace in no very good humour. "Where is Violet?" he said; "please send her down, as we have no time to lose. Is she ready?"

Violet was up-stairs, but not ready. The final decorations were being pushed forward desperately. Nothing could be found, nothing was put on right or straight; agitated fingers tried to attach portions of dress to poor fluttering Violet's figure. The poor child had been bathing her face for hours, until it became all flustered and inflamed, and she had the wildness that comes from want of sleep. Every moment expresses came from impatient Fermor below. At last she came down.

He started back. "What *have* you been doing with your face? Good gracious! what is the matter?"

Violet came up to him timorously. "Oh, it is nothing," she said; "we have been in such a hurry. Let us go."

"But why hurry?" said he. "I thought that all this morning, *surely*—Let me see you in the light. Heavens! Is there no eau-de-cologne in the house? This is dreadful!"

"Indeed, *indeed*, I tried all I could. I have been bathing——"

"Ah, that accounts for it," said he, calmly; "you have certainly a judicious sister. And you must not mind if I make another remark—but it is too serious an occasion to stand upon trifles. And that bonnet—*Where* is your little lace bonnet?"

"Oh," said her sister, standing by her side like a workwoman over a piece of work newly brought home, "this is a new one, just got home expressly;" and she telegraphed a special appeal to Fermor to forbear further criticism. He shrugged his shoulders. "Come, let us go. We must pull through as well as we can."

They went alone, for Lady Laura had said, "Please let her come without any of her other people. I am really not equal to it to-day. Later, of course—but please don't ask me to-day." In truth, poor Violet was in the most unfortunate plight for presentation that could be conceived. On this day she had determined to be splendid, and the result was that she looked a thousand times better in her every-day dress.

As they went in, Fermor said solemnly, himself sadly out of humour, "Now, please recollect all my instructions. I assure you, though I dare say you don't see it in that light, you don't know how much depends upon the next few moments."

Thus encouraged, Violet entered. Primness and austerity welcomed her. Lady Laura rose upon her gauntly, and wound her thin cartilages about her. The "girls," with a set smile and faces cold as china, waited their turn.

"Sit down, pray do," said Lady Laura, looking curiously into her face. "I am so glad to know you, I am indeed." The others sat about and looked at her as curiously, taking her dress as their department. In utter confusion, and with Fermor's eye steadily on her, Violet could only murmur and murmur a little stupidly, when Lady Laura got out some fashionable platitudes and gave them to her, and then paused, waiting to hear how they would be acknowledged—Violet could only say she was "so kind," and "so——" an encomium that reached no greater

maturity. She heard Fermor change his place in his chair impatiently, then all her small forces fell into complete disorder.

Alicia Mary was busy with that unlucky bonnet, and Violet felt that she was. The conversation languished terribly.

"We must come to know you a little better," said Lady Laura; "if you have any spare moments, we shall always be delighted to see you. In time, you will have, of course, more confidence in me. Alicia, you will make out Mrs. Manuel's address; we shall be delighted to leave cards and make her acquaintance."

Alicia Mary and Blanche and Laura gave her a cold accolade, and said they should meet her during the season in Town, which they also supposed she found "delightful."

Violet, in a tone that seemed to deprecate any violence, said she did not know. She was longing to be gone. Fermor abruptly stood up. He was angry, and saw that the whole had been unsatisfactory; yet, curiously enough, he was not so much angry with Violet as with his relations. "I don't want their patronising airs. I can do in spite of them." It was not a pleasant walk home.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-NINTH.

SIR HOPKINS EXAMINES THE GROUND.

ON the next morning, excited by a sort of uneasy curiosity, he went to see his family again, and said, with an air of concern, "Well, how did you find her?" Lady Laura, with an affectation of ingenuity, sent out her daughters on various pretexts. "I really do not like," she said, confidentially, "to speak of it before them. It is no use going into the matter now. It does no good. So tell me what time are you thinking of for the marriage. We shall, of course, try and meet your views in every possible way."

"Oh, yes," said Fermor, "but what did you think? Don't be afraid," he said; "tell me candidly. I am not a boy now, you know."

"What is the use?" she said. "*They* were more disappointed than *I* was. I am an old lady now. Seriously, as you do ask me, what *was* over your eyes? I declare solemnly I

thought I should have dropped when she came in—so unformed, no manners, *no looks!*”

“All I can say is,” said he, impatiently, “*here* she is considered the belle of the place.”

“*Here,*” said she, with a half smile. “Oh, that, of course. After your description and all, I really felt a chill at my heart. No style of any kind, not able to speak; and as for dress, I lay it on you to speak seriously to her, for really it is not creditable.”

How this criticism, which was in the tone of maternal condolence, affected Captain Fermor may be conceived. He thought of it a good deal afterwards, and the remark about dress appeared to him specially just. Lady Laura seemed anxious to change the subject, so as not to give him pain. Sir Hopkins Pocock, she told him, would arrive in a day or so. “Seriously, you must lay your mind to making way with him. He is wonderfully inclined towards you, and said the other day you had the making of a diplomatist in you. He is to be a governor in a month or so, and I think could be got to take you out with him. He will have splendid appointments in his gift.”

Fermor's face lightened. “Well, I always thought,” he said, tranquilly, “you should have put me in the diplomatic line. I should have done very well as an attaché. If I *have* a taste, it is for negotiation. I should be very glad indeed to go out with Pocock.”

“Then I will speak to him about it,” said Lady Laura.

Sir Hopkins did arrive the next day, plenipotentiary, as it were, accredited to a new country. He was seen perking down the street with an air of smirking surprise, as who should say, “Really now, this is very forward civilisation; quite surprising, 'pon my word.” If he went into a shop, he seemed to go as an embassy to that shop, and prepared to negotiate a little for the article he wanted, as if he were dealing with the Waipiti tribe. At every turn something—really now—quite took him by surprise. He entered the principal bookseller's shop in the place, and negotiated out of him the leading persons then residing there. The principal bookseller had an inside room where two or three newspapers drifted about, and taking down Sir Hopkins's name with Lady Laura's, became impressed suddenly with respect.

“We are very full indeed now, sir,” he said. “Colonel Gunter was in here this morning, and said he never recollected such a season. The bishop came only yesterday.”

Sir Hopkins was surprised. “No, really? You don't tell

me so? Now, what bishop? It cannot be the Bishop—of—er——?”

“Yes, sir. Doctor Bridles. We have got his lordship’s ‘Charge,’ which has made such a sensation. Got down six copies last week, and only one left.”

Sir Hopkins was smilingly amazed. And so this was the “Charge,” really now? That *was* curious. Well, and who else, now?

“We never were so full. The Miss Campbells, and the officers, and Major Carter, who gave the little parties.”

“Carter! Carter!” said Sir Hopkins. “What! Not an elderly man, with light clean face, and greyish whiskers? No. I should say not?”

“Why yes, sir,” said the leading bookseller, a little mystified by this way of putting the thing. “Why, that is very like him. It must be the same. He has been in the best society, I assure you, sir. A great friend of Captain Fermor’s, sir.”

“Oh! That is very nice indeed. Come now. A great friend,” said Sir Hopkins, setting his head on one side, and resting his hands on the rail of a chair, as if it were his perch, and he were about to drink.

“Oh yes. In fact, sir, they say that it was at his house that Captain Fermor’s marriage came about. Interesting, sir?”

Then Sir Hopkins, having bought half a quire of note-paper, and not having subscribed, went his way pleasantly. This was what he called “getting the lie of the ground.”

Fermor thought a good deal over what Lady Laura had hinted. It diverted him, too, from other unpleasant reflections. He was pleased with the notion of the diplomatic opening. “The very thing for me,” he said. “He is most likely of the old-fashioned school, and I will go out with him as secretary nominally—in reality as adviser and minister.”

Major Carter, he felt, had a sort of little bill against him, and he thought he would settle it by a dinner at the mess. “No man shall say I am in his books,” Captain Fermor added, sternly; and Major Carter came to dinner that very day.

Mess dinners repeat themselves, and are all according to a “sealed pattern.” Major Carter adapted himself to the “young fellows,” and was pronounced, with serious military gravity, to be a man of “uncommon knowledge.” Wise Folly, busy with its pipe, shook its head with profundity at Wise Folly in the opposite lounging-chair, and uttered thickly that Carter was a man that had “read a lot.” A stranger was always welcome;

for they had gone round and round over the dried-up patch of grass they called their "minds," until they knew every foot of it by heart. The wells, in which there was such brackish talk as horses, uniforms, "my setter pup," and "jolly" cigars, had long been pumped dry. Heads turned eagerly to drink up the clear brook of Carter talk. And yet he was insinuating and deferential, and with skilful tact suffered Fermor to lead.

After dinner there came the little ante-room, the playground, where the youths could disport with tobacco and strong drinks. A few got out the card-table, and applied themselves painfully to the serious game of whist. Major Carter shook his head sadly as he was asked to take a hand. "No, no," he said. "What I know of whist was bought a little expensively. A very pretty corner of Carterstown had to pay for bad play. After that night I gave up. Ask General Munro (then Colonel Munro—he was there the whole night) if I did not bear it pretty well." When the cigars were lit all round, and the room seemed glowing like a coal country at night, Major Carter got very pleasant, and began to unpack some of the little worldly wares he had gathered up in his journey through life. He set before them ghostly dinner-parties, ghostly balls, little domestic farces, in which Sandwich, Lord Yokel's brother, who was humorously called by his friends Lobster Sandwich, from the colour of his face, figured. General—then Colonel—Munro also had part in these recollections. More interesting, however, was it when Major Carter brought upon the scene a certain Maltese lady whom he had met in garrison, "really one of the finest creatures in the Italian way" he ever encountered in the whole course of his life. "For myself," continued Major Carter, "I am not very much in *that* line; and men tell me such and such women are handsome, and of course I take their word for it. But really, when I saw this girl coming down the Strada Reale, literally lighting up the pathway, I confess I did feel ever so little curious about her."

The youths settled themselves to listen earnestly—for at least the very youngest, not eighteen, might speak judicially on this subject—when a mess waiter entered with a card in his hand, and said to Fermor, "That gentleman wishes to see you."

"Who can want me at this time? 'Sir Hopkins Pocock!'" Oh!" Fermor added, aloud, and rose to go out. He therefore did not see the curious effect of this name on his friend. Major Carter gave a scared look round from one to the other, and half rose also.

"Well," said a Boy-officer, breathless, "what did she do then?"

"Why then——" Major Carter said, abstractedly: "I fear I must go now. Good gracious! Had no idea—so late."

A tumult of protest. "Oh, hang it. Confound it! Tell us about the woman."

"Must go, indeed," said Major Carter, looking uneasily at the door. "Letters, you know."

Meanwhile Fermor was greeted warmly by his relation. "Just been up at your lodgings. Followed you down here. Don't know that I should know you, though."

"You must come in, my dear sir," said Fermor, with warmth; "we are just sitting after dinner. I asked a friend, Major Carter."

"Carter—Major Carter. Is he here?"

"Oh yes," said Fermor. "A sharp clever man of the world. You are certain to like him."

"Am sure he is the same—met him at Monaco. And a friend of yours? Come, I *will* go in and sit down for a few minutes."

As they entered, they brushed by the major, who was hurrying out, with his hat half way raised.

"Good gracious! where are you going?" said Fermor catching him by the arm.

"Major Carter, Major Carter!" said the diplomatist, with undiplomatic heartiness, "we have met before. You recollect *me*—Pocock? So glad. So *very* glad." And the diplomatic head was jerked on one side, and the diplomatic hand held out.

Major Carter slowly took a sort of under-look at him, much as a dog does suspicious of his master, and instantly changing into the former crisp Major Carter that was sitting telling of the Maltese lady, became delighted to welcome an old acquaintance met with at Monaco.

"Sir Hopkins Pocock," said Fermor, introducing him to the company. "Major Dobbs, Mr. Slack, Captain Showers."

The hospitality of a cigar was promptly offered, and several open cases were proffered. Sir Hopkins chose one carefully, and smiled on all round in return; but to Major Carter he was specially attentive; appealing to him, and listening to him when he had appealed, almost with reverence. "Stay long at Monaco after I left? We had a very pleasant time of it. Recollect old Grimani from Naples, when he tore up my *Times*? They said he had lost fifty thousand francs that night."

And Major Carter, who had not seemed to recollect him well at first, now became as an old friend of the liveliest memory, and a very delightful and genial old friend.

Fermor was pleased. "I always knew," he said sagely, next day, "that Carter was of the proper set; I can always tell by the ring of the metal." He was pleased, too, with his new relation. "Just the sort of man I required," he said; and presently had drawn him out of the crowd, now beginning to bet upon the whist party, and was talking to him gravely.

"They told me, sir," he said, "of your promotion. I am very glad of it. It requires peculiar gifts to govern. If you were thinking—as they told me you were—of taking with you any man of a peculiar turn that way, as secretary, or that sort of thing, I confess I should be very glad to go. You can understand that a man, who feels himself made for better things, and with ambition, must find himself rather thrown away in this sort of thing;" and he glanced round the room.

"Oh, of course," said the diplomatist; "quite so. And so you find this place dull? It seems to me pleasant enough. I rather envy you here. Do they ever give a ball or a dinner, eh?"

"Oh, I suppose so," said Fermor, carelessly. "I don't know, really. I am the worst person in the world to apply to. But, sir—of course, if you have chosen any one already, that is a different thing. But I *think* I could be of use; in fact, I am sure of it. Better, perhaps, than any one else."

"Ah, quite so," said the other; "no doubt. And the men here, how do you find them now? Pleasant, I should say, for mere daily use—like roast leg of mutton, not a refined dish, but we have to come back to it."

"But *have* you made up your mind," said Fermor, keeping to his point, "if I might ask you directly?"

"Do you know," said Sir Hopkins, turning round on him, "you remind me of the chief who was our stiffest card among the Waipiti. All our diplomatic forms were thrown away on him. Well, no. My good Charles—we will talk of this to-morrow."

Fermor, fretting at this cool reception of his proposals, which he always liked to be as promptly received as they were offered, said ironically, "You have to make the acquaintance of these men here, as yet, sir."

"No, no," said the diplomatist, smiling. "I have read a good many more men than I have books. For instance, that

sunburnt man opposite, who made that comic remark about the halter of a horse."

Fermor smiled with compassion. "He never gets out of a circle much larger than a halter," he said. "Showers is his name. He is our professional jester!"

"Showers? Showers? I knew a Colonel Showers who commanded out in the islands, and headed the attack on the Pah."

"My uncle, sir," said Showers, striking in; "he was out there many years."

"Good gracious!" said the diplomatist, drawing his chair over to him, "how curious, how wonderful! He was my great friend—often dined with me at Government House. How is he? Heard from him?"

The diplomatist was so delighted at this discovery, that he addicted himself to Showers for the rest of the night. Showers, elated by the proud distinction, grew, as it were, rampant in his ardour, and threw out on all sides his fescennine jests, as they would be called in the old Roman History, being reckless enough, even, to level a shaft or two at Fermor. But the face of Fermor wore an expression of deep pain and disgust as he saw this strange preference. Later, something like this thought passed through his mind: "That the destinies of thousands of our fellow-creatures should be committed to a man who was so ignorant in reading the human mind! Surprising blindness!" It made him sad.

Late that night they set out to walk home together. Major Carter and Fermor, with the diplomatist in the middle. At Fermor's gate they said good-night, and Fermor went in. But he heard Sir Hopkins say in his cheeriest diapason, "My dear Carter, give me your arm! Which way do *you* go? I want to have a talk with you over old times."

CHAPTER THE THIRTIETH.

SIR HOPKINS'S VERDICT.

FERMOR was beginning to grow sour and pettish at the course his life was taking. He was annoyed, and he disliked being annoyed, he said. This road was getting rough, and he preferred walking on the grass. Perhaps he was piqued that

every lady was not in a tumult of delight, astonishment, or envy, at what he had done.

In this train of mind he again set the decorators at work, put together the new "Hachettes," and went in to call at his next door neighbour's. He also wanted a little soothing; and often a successful visit, he said, was like a glass of anisette to a Frenchman.

The girl's eyes sparkled as he entered, and she half rose. The colour came to her cheeks. "Even in her dress," thought he, "quite the lady." Her eye fell on M. Hachette's little volumes. "I know," said he, "from experience, how welcome a new book is to the convalescent. Of course it is easy for any one to say: 'Write to that man in London, and tell him to send a box of the newest things.' And you *do* get," added he, smiling, "the very newest—trash. No; I think I know your taste by this time, and the tone of your mind."

"It is so kind of you," she said, eagerly turning them over.

"I got them expressly," he said, "and I have good news. Our friend Roger le Garçon is on his way. We shall have him next week."

"Next week!" said the girl. "You are too good to me. Papa says what shall I do when I lose our neighbour? I must only make the most of the time."

"Oh," said Fermor, smiling, and thinking of the metaphor he had written to Mrs. Fazakerly—his were always good serviceable images that would wash and wear—"you are thinking of the approaching dissolution, the lying in state, and the interment. A time is appointed for all men. But it is a good way off. The judge has given me a long day."

This was a very natural girl, and she said more with her open honest face than with her voice, "Oh, I am so glad—so *very* glad."

Fermor looked at her with great interest. "So you are sorry for the poor convict?" he said.

The other looked down. "It is all selfishness, I am afraid. You will say we miss what has been a comfort and assistance to us, and—you have been very, *very* kind."

She said this in a straightforward way, without any affectation. At that moment it occurred to him how helplessly that poor little Violet would have floundered, and what a spectacle of confusion she would have exhibited.

"I hope," he said, graciously, "we do not give up all our friends when we marry. It would be very hard if we were to

lose our caste like the Indians, and be cut off from society. I shall be still the same Captain Fermor, I hope. I sincerely trust so. But, as I say, the thing is altogether indefinite. That is to say, I never like being fixed to a day, or a month, or even a year. They must give me breathing space and opportunity to look about. And so," he said, smiling encouragement, and morally smoothing her hair, "we can hope to spend a great many more hours together over Roger le Garçon yet."

He was greatly delighted with her confidence in him, and the naïveté of her almost unconcealed liking, which he thought he would play on a little more still.

"I would give the world to see her," she said, fixing her soft, honest eyes on him. "When I am strong enough to drive out, which will be to-morrow, I shall get papa to take me where she is walking. I can look at her hard, without being rude."

Fermor good-naturedly passed over the false expression in this speech, for he might have told her it would be rudeness all the same; then said, "Why not see her in the regular way? I tell you what—Violet shall come and see *you*."

"No, no," said she, alarmed, and colouring "Not for the world."

"And why not?" said Fermor, still watching her.

"Violet!" she said. "Oh, what a charming name! And I am *sure* suits her."

"Yes," he said, carelessly, "it does. I confess I rather fancy a name of a more neutral tint. You know you expect everything to be in harmony—to be shrinking *like* a violet."

"And I am *sure* she shrinks. Tell me, now."

"Yes," said Fermor, laughing. "She does—almost a little too much. I almost like *your* name—Mary—better."

"Oh no, no," said she, in confusion. "You only *say* that."

"I am speaking of the name in general," said he, gravely

This sort of discussion would have been a little dangerous with any one less trained than Fermor. He felt he had the reins of the situation well in hand. He was thinking how much nearer the edge he could drive, when the door half opened, and a sort of little sharp voice said persuasively,—

"What dy'e say? May I come in? Eh?"

The face of Sir Hopkins was looking round the edge of the door, as if he had his eye to a telescope. "I declare, my dear Charles, you here! Just dropped in to see Mr. Carlay. Carter was to have met me. Miss Carlay, I am *sure*. Charles, I must ask you——"

The other was really taken aback. What brought him; above all, what brought him at such a moment, when the lectures on Roger le Garçon were about beginning? But, true to his principle of never being surprised, never thrown off his centre, Fermor introduced his relation at once.

The delicate girl received the visitor with self-possession. No shell had exploded in *that* drawing-room. There had been nothing like an order for execution. She went to meet him with a smile and with a welcome, she said she was sorry her father was out, and seemed not in the least embarrassed at having to play the conversational game against two gentlemen. She uttered the usual hopes and questions. Was Sir Hopkins going to stay with them long, and how did he like the place?

Immensely, Sir Hopkins said. Did not know when he had liked a place so much. Though, indeed, to a man who had roughed it a good deal in the world, all places should be like all beds—very much the same.

"Indeed," said the young girl, half shyly, half earnestly, and with an animation that became her wonderfully, "our little ways and manners must seem very trifling to *you*, who have travelled so many, *many* miles, and have managed those dreadfully savage people. I would give the world to know how it is done," she added, the shyness being now all absorbed in the earnestness, "and how even a beginning is made—the language."

(This was not the venial hypocrisy of the drawing-room, for Fermor had indeed invested his relation's achievements with an air of adventure.)

"Why, you *don't* tell me," Sir Hopkins said, in great delight, "that you have been reading up the Blue Books? Where *did* you pick up about the Waipiti?"

Fermor and Sir Hopkins went away together. Pretty much the same feeling was in both minds. "My dear boy," said the latter, detaining him gently at the library door, "we older fellows may not have as fresh a taste, but I fancy I know a girl about as well as you know a horse. Wonderful creature that! Piquant—everything—and *such* tact! Positively, if I had to choose between our good little innocent rustic and *that* girl, I declare——" And he finished the sentence in an expressive squeeze of his lips. "To say nothing," he added, in a lower voice, "of the money. Ha! ha! I suppose I am getting old and exploded—though the F. O., I am glad to say, does not think so—but of all the incomprehensible bewildering

things in the world this selection of yours—of our amiable little rustic——”

With another man Fermor would have burst out haughtily, “Incomprehensible to *you*—that is *your* concern.” But he restrained himself. This relation was to be dealt with by suasion. “You are never tired, sir, of this unfortunate subject,” he said. “I am truly grieved, indeed I am, that——”

“Now, *now*,” said Sir Hopkins, “*why will you?* I never succeed in conveying myself. Though *you* know, we are trained *not* to convey ourselves. But ‘it intrigues’ me, as old Mungo used to say in his battered French. I don’t see it. I *want* to see it. Explain it. Here are you in a whole parkful of desirable girls, every field here alive with them—money, rank, everything—and you pick out our little rustic. My boy, I tell you you have a game in all this.”

Fretful, pettish, hot, wounded (if he had been a girl he would have cried), angry, Fermor did not know how to answer, could not answer.

“It is *so* odd,” continued Sir Hopkins. “But I shall find it out, depend upon it. It quite piques me. When I was an attaché they used to call me ‘Young Tally,’ a funny abbreviation, you know, of the great diplomatist. First, that fine girl the sister—and now—*this* fine girl. Ah! deep, deep fellow!”

Sir Hopkins came to Fermor next day almost chuckling.

“This place,” he said, “is getting quite exciting. It is really a fine training-ground. I thought my diplomatic joints and muscles would get stiff and rusty for want of practice. But I find I have plenty to do. My dear friend, I have managed our little affair. Would you believe *that*? And all in a day!”

Fermor became good humoured at once. “I am so glad, sir. It is *so* good of you.”

“I mean about our young friend Showers. He’s a lad of good spirit, and should be encouraged.”

Fermor’s face began to contract, and shrink like metal cooling. “I am quite tired of him,” said he, impatiently. “And I think, sir, when you come to know him better, so will you be. Why, there’s nothing in him; nothing. Of all the empty, self-sufficient wind-bags, without an idea beyond a horse, and the horse-laugh——”

Sir Hopkins shook his head from side to side with great enjoyment. “Ah, I dare say you’re right,” he said. “We have all our fancies. And, *à propos*, how is our little rustic to-day? She is such a charming bit of natural simplicity.

Because, observe, I distinguish, she is not one of your peasants let loose in a drawing-room. I *must* say she is all nature. And her fine sister. Ah! I never shall let *that* subject go, never, you military owl, you. Master Charles, if *I* had been at your elbow when you were choosing! I declare to you, Charles, on—my—so-lemn word of honour" (Sir Hopkins put little jerks between each word), "if I were ten years younger, I would go to her within the next half hour, and offer her the vacancy in my house. What a pair we should be! What a governor's wife she would be! We would rule the colonies. What was the reason, eh, Charles? I think you were a little in awe of her, eh? I have very sharp eyes. I remark she has a quiet, decisive manner about her, which (naturally enough) *you* would not relish. Only for her, how would it have turned out, *I* should like to know? Clever, clever woman, that! I admire her."

"I assure you, sir," said Fermor, excitedly, "in *that* view you are quite astray."

"Perhaps so," said Sir Hopkins, carelessly, "perhaps so. But a word of advice, Charles. Don't have the look of being directed by any whole family—I say the look; because, whether you are or not, is quite a matter for your own concern. I see the beginnings—it may be all fancy—and my advice is worth something."

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-FIRST.

THE EASTPORT SHOW.

SOME intelligent and influential persons living about Eastport and its dependencies had long been thinking that the only way to crown, as it were, its growing commercial importance, was to hold a cattle festival, or congress.

You had a great grazing country close by, said Lord Porkchester, the local lord—you had a great carrying trade with the opposite coast—you had a convenient place of export—you were within half a day's travel of one of the great markets of the empire—you had pasture land unrivalled in Europe for richness—you had an intelligent population, with more or less proportion of the "bone and sinew" which made the State—you had, in short, every element suitable for a cattle show. Lord Pork-

chester "looked around" him at a preliminary meeting held at the hotel, and saw all these things. Nature in that part of the world, it would seem, was rising up, and clamorously appealing for a cattle show.

In good time the Eastport walls broke out into a healthy eruption of posters. The committee, with Lord Porkchester in the chair, sat daily. Its sub-divisions, the dinner committee, the reception committee, and the ball committee, sat daily also. By-and-by a bit of waste ground became strewn with planks and timbers, as if a hundred Indian men had been wrecked and gone to pieces there; and lengths of very raw deal shedding began to spread out, as if they were unrolled from a reel. By-and-by, too, engines that seemed like racks and enlarged thumb-bikens, were seen reclining awkwardly on the quay, sprawling like metal tortoises, and unable to get up. These were the famous "mowers," the more famous "winnowing machines," and, above all, the wonderful patent "bone-crushing machine," which title did, indeed, in the minds of serious and religious elderly ladies, seem to support the "rack" theory of this favourite "controversy." No wonder that the Eastport local paper reminded its public that the "eyes of the empire" were watching it.

Later on the show animals began to arrive. Precious beasts, hidden away in their own fat, and covered up in clothes, were seen reeling and tottering through the street, led by rings fixed in the sensitive part of the nostrils. At corners they would halt and give out deep and piteous protests. One or two, full of heat and foam, and blowing off steam like a locomotive, lay down with all their fine clothes in the mire, and looked round with deeply injured eyes. But no one had yet seen Bullington's noble white cow, "Milky Jane," who had taken prizes in every county, and who might have been hung all over with cups like a French lemonade-seller. She travelled down in a van of her own—first class—resided at the best hotels of her tribe, and arrived under cover of night. Through the bars of small railed carts could be seen something like blinking, corpulent old gentlemen, who had dined well, and drunk very well, and who were drowsy and stertorous. These proved to be competing pigs.

It was quite a provincial festival. There were judges, and stewards, and committees, and heavy agricultural men, a little higher in intelligence than the other animals which were exhibited. Everybody came. Other ribbons fluttered in the air

besides those of committee-men and judges; and all the ladies of the district courageously picked their steps through the lanes and alleys of the yard. And the band of Captain Fermor's regiment, led by Herr Sangmann, a saffron-coloured German, played waltzes and overtures, after the rude rough fashion of British regimental music—stiff and painful as the stocks the men wear, noisy yet thin, shrieking and ear-piercing, yet unsustained. Ladies were led round to have audiences of the prize animals in their cabinets. The visitors saw tails waving sadly, like pendulums, and glowering and reproachful eyes measuring them; they saw, too, what seemed monstrous breastworks and ramparts of flesh and fat. Gentle voices were attuned to cadences of wonder and delight, and curiosity; though the air was heavy, and dresses had to be gathered up carefully, and there was an embroidery of straw to every petticoat; but there was young Mangel, with other charming showmen (whose regular residence was in the saddle), who went round with them, and put the thing in so attractive a light (like Professor Faraday lecturing), that this avidity for bucolic knowledge became natural.

"Milky Jane" attracted the largest crowd. She was all pure white, with pale pink nostrils and "lovely horns" (a casual burst of ecstasy from one of the ladies), and every now and then she turned her head round to look, with a dreamy complacent expression of perfect happiness. Man of the world or diplomatist might vainly hope for that perfection of ease and unaffected absence of restraint before company which "Milky Jane" exhibited.

A poultry show was part of the sight. Some one had put a question about a week before, specially addressed to no one, "Why not have a poultry show?" And no one being prepared with an answer, this was resolved upon. Ladies in the neighbourhood, who had long nurtured mysterious-looking birds, sent them in; and rare specimens of the Dorking and Cochin families strained over each other's shoulders with jerks and starts, and looked out through their wire-netting like apoplectic retired colonels in the bay-window of a club.

Captain Cadby led round the Miss Campbells. They were enraptured with Captain Cadby's band. With the ingenuousness of girlhood, the younger said she could listen to it "for ever!" In those raptures she almost hinted that the music of an after state *must* be of the pattern of Captain Cadby's band. With more pointedness the elder insinuated that this celestial perfection was owing to Captain Cadby himself.

"Yes," said that officer; "we pay him well, that's the secret. And I blow up Sangmann—that's the way, too. You see, I sometimes go down and hear them practise. I make Sangmann keep up the pace, you see. They take everything too slow. Ever hear the 'Pop-goes-the-Weazel Galop'? No! Oh, hang it, you *must* hear that. I'll make Sangmann play it. Do you know," added Captain Cadby, modestly, "it was I that made him set it. I do believe there's more genuine music in that air—though common fellows wouldn't see it—than in all the music of the great swells, and what-d'ye-call-'em Mozarts, they puff off so."

The girls looked at each other in speechless delight. They knew he was musical—they always had said it.

Well, he was as musical as most fellows. He would tell them what—he knew what was good, and what was bad. Oh, had they seen his new "Snaffle?"

No! Delight, rapture, wonderment, all struggling together. What! a snaffle, a real snaffle?

"Be sure! I say, come along. 'This way.'"

This way was through a little bog, over which the officer tramped gaily, in very stout boots. The girls were prettily shod in pale cloth boots, the colour of their dresses. "I say, look at my boots! I don't care how muddy it is! I'm all right." The girls had served in the ranks, and were true drawing-room Spartans. They never faltered, and walked on bravely.

The snaffle might have been a diamond necklace, it caused such delight and surprise. The sisters struggled for it. They seemed to be in the enjoyment of the beatific vision. Such ingenuity, skill, and incredible talent. But had he thought of a name for it, the elder said, with a sigh—some pretty lady's pretty name? He should call it the Alexandra or the Carlotta Snaffle.

"Oh," said Captain Cadby, in an off-hand way, "that is settled long ago. I call it the 'Jenny,' after a pretty girl in the north of England I am desperately gone with. You've nobody here to match her. I could tell you a long history about *her*."

Something like the breath of an east wind seemed to pass across the Campbell faces, but they were well disciplined, and were as eager about the girl in the north, and "laid on" as much surprise, joy, interest, and other varied emotions, as they had done for the "snaffle."

The next night there was to be the ball. This was to be

given by the united regiments. The soldier organises the best ball in the world, because he does not spare money. The public rooms were taken. A ball committee for "advice and decoration" was formed. Major Stagg, who had hung his rooms with some dreadfully rhubarb-looking horses, and who had a rude facility in sketching yachts, was put in the chair as representing Art in the regiment. A couple of guns were dragged in and hung about with flags and evergreens; muskets were grouped in a star on the wall, and the whole christened a "trophy." The bare walls were draped with pink and white calico. Fermor was of the committee of advice and decoration, and was for "getting down" some one from the Messrs. Tabaret, but a cabal, secretly prompted, it was believed, by "that low fellow," Showers, received his proposition so offensively, that he withdrew from the board altogether. "Don't ask *me* about their proceedings," he said; "I know nothing about them. I have washed my hands of the whole business. Let us wait and see what will come of it."

It was the great day of the great night. Lady Laura with her three daughters, with the versatility of French soldiers—who carry their cooking-pans and *tentes d'abris* on their backs—were beginning to find that Eastport was not altogether barren. This hard-working family were as the Irish reapers, who come over and find work waiting them in all places.

Fermor found her, on the morning of the ball, as it were in a drain, up to her waist in water, plying the shovel. "Violet," he said, moodily, "Violet of course goes with you? What time do you call for her?"

Lady Laura jumped out of her trench. "I have not heard of that arrangement," she said. "I really did not know she was going."

"It is only the right thing," said Fermor. "I suppose she must be brought out properly. At what hour, then?"

"Why, my dear Charles," said Lady Laura, retiring, with her neck at an angle to get a better view of a dress, "to tell you the truth, I should be glad to do anything for you and your future wife, but really the thing is getting so troublesome, and there is so much diplomatic work and care about what we are to say, that really I don't understand it. That is the truth. One day she is sick, and I take her to be offended or hurt at something; another day she is hurt at something, and she turns out to be sick."

"You must consider she is a child," said Fermor, coldly, "and make allowance."

"Ah, that's just it," said she, shaking out the folds of the dress, and retiring again to get a good view. "I am too old, Charles, to begin studying children. I expect to be studied myself a little now. I have my own girls to look to, and perhaps not much time to do that in. To speak plainly to you, Charles," she added, laying a strip of ribbon down the dress to see the effect, "if you had married an heiress, or some one of rank, you would have a right to expect this sort of thing from us. But for a little girl of *that* kind, you could hardly expect us to put ourselves out of the way. I have a duty to my girls. There, the milliner of this place—a wretched creature, without two ideas—is waiting, and I have literally to teach her everything."

Fermor departed without a word. He was too proud to explain. He told Violet she must go with her brother and sister. In these visits, of late, he had come very moody and distrait. There was uncertainty and flutter in gentle hearts when he came. He was under a sense of injury, especially as regards Pauline, who had attempted to control him. She said, in her natural way, when he told her of the new arrangement, "But how strange! how odd!"

Fermor looked at her suspiciously. "How strange, or how odd, pray?" he said, with hostility. "My mother, Lady Laura, has her daughters to look after. At her time of life, it is rather too much to expect that she can adapt herself to our little whims and changes." (This protest Fermor adapted from his mother's speech.)

Pauline was looking at him with calm wonder, and a sad gaze that seemed to "bring him to account"—a manner that was disagreeable to him.

"Surely," he said, a little warmly, "you have your sister and your brother! I have tickets for you all. Good gracious! Let us not make difficulties out of these little trifles."

"Oh yes, yes, yes," said Violet, hurriedly. "To be sure. Charles is quite right. I can go *any* way."

Fermor smiled grimly. "Scarcely," he said. "I shall not be able to go with you myself, having to be at the rooms. But I shall be at the door to meet you. Don't be late. Pray don't."

He went away beating the steps of the stair with his cane. He was dissatisfied with all things. "Everybody is making a fuss," he said, fuming Violet, when the door closed, gave a

piteous look over at her sister, and then her head dropped. Actually, a faint little line of care was coming on her cheek. The sister went over to her.

"He is worried," she said, "darling, with business. He is getting his affairs into order, which *must* be done before men marry. And, darling, he is—so fond of you. I saw the way he looked over at you."

A wave of colour drifted softly across Violet's cheek, and washed out that little line of care.

"You think so," she said, in delight. "Do you know, I am such a baby. I fancied he was a little cross with me."

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-SECOND.

THE BALL.

NOW were the lamps lighted, and rivers of crimson carpeting glowing in the light, and there was actually a last man on a last ladder, driving in a last nail. Now were a party of soldiers standing at their posts outside, holding torches—animated chandeliers—a pleasant device ingeniously adapted by the one novel-reading officer out of the Legend of Montrose. Now were the carriages arriving, and now was the colonel and his followers, bashful as boys, drawn up to welcome their company. The whole society of Eastport came in swarms. They spread over the rooms.

Picini—bright-eyed and mercurial—was in the gallery leading his orchestra. For in this point Fermor had prevailed; they *had* got down this famous band. Captain Cadby was in deep protest; and, far on in the night, he said many times with the earnestness and feeling that sets in after supper, "I wish to God they would play the Pop-goes-the-Weazel Galop."

Fermor leaned against a pillar near the door, listening. "So punctuality is not to be of our virtues, it seems," he said. "Even *they* are in time?" He was thinking of his mother and sisters, who had long since debouched, taken up good ground, and were already well engaged with skirmishers. The three girls had been "placed out" respectably. Young Brett hovered about Fermor wistfully, and made a request. "My dear friend," said Fermor, answering him good naturedly, "it would quite be useless. You see they are engaged, what they call so many

deep. Besides, I tell you frankly, it would not do exactly—you see."

The night was getting on. Here was a first galop, or perhaps first "riot." Picini had rushed into his famous Pandemonium Galop—a wild inspiring "Call," which could not be resisted. The Eastport young men and women were kept on half diet, in matter of dancing, all the year, and a full meal was rare. When the first notes of the Pandemonium were heard, they flung themselves on it like shipwrecked passengers before whom food is set.

Fermor, still at his post, looked on. "This is really pushing it too far!" he said, indignantly. "That elder one, perhaps, wants to train me—break me in, I suppose. I must teach her I am not quite a schoolboy. I shall wait no longer. It will be a good lesson for them."

Showers was keeping close to the door, perhaps watching him, looking for material for his odious jokes. He was walking away, when a fresh party entered and went through the form of presentation to the bashful committee. This hid them for a moment. But the next instant, to his amazement, he saw that the two figures, who were entering, a little bewildered, into a strange country—as it were into a tropical island—were his neighbour Mr. Carlay, and his neighbour's daughter! The father grim, unjointed as ever, and in an evening dress apparently of some dark metal—as stiff as one of the hired chandeliers; but the daughter, fresh, blooming, fair—dressed, as it seemed to him, sumptuously, and, what he more approved of, with good taste, and with jewels in her hair. They both stood a moment dazzled, like strangers in a foreign land, and then Fermor, who was almost rubbing his eyes, saw "that Showers" hurry up (Fermor had done him injustice—he was not watching *him*), seize on them, overpower them with welcome, and bear them away. Presently he saw them enthroned by the officious Showers on a dais kept for distinguished people. He saw smiles of delight on Miss Carlay's face as Showers wantoned in his low jests. He heard two of his own cloth passing by say to each other that "Showers was making a good thing of it up there," and was a "confounded" lucky fellow.

She had seen Fermor too, and had given no start of joyful surprise, but merely a tranquil nod, as though the thing were of course. Showers was jubilant, exultant, and almost "dancing" round them, always impeding Fermor's view. "Just like them all," he said, bitterly; "a new doll for every day in the week.

And such a doll!" He saw, too, Sir Hopkins standing with them, talking pleasantly, with his arm on Showers's shoulder, in good-humoured affection.

Here they were at last. Fermor saw their entrance from afar off. It was unassuming and timid; Pauline, the brother, and Violet a little behind. "Heavens!" thought Fermor, with a little stamp, "will no one impress a little style upon them? What *are* they afraid of?" The public did not form an avenue to stare at them as they came in. And the dress! Great efforts had been made, but there was something wanting. Violet was not brilliant or splendid; yet her little troubles and anxieties had given her a soft look, and a sort of seductive interest. Many faces turned to look after her: especially those experienced eyes who, like bric-a-brac collectors, can tell a bit of real beauty, however odd and rococo the setting. Pauline, in truth, dimmed her a little.

Fermor went up to them. "You are late," he said, calmly, to the brother; "I have really waited a whole hour at the door. Come," and he took Violet's arm, "we must find you a seat on the dais."

Violet shrank away. "Oh no, not in that public place, dear Charles—Oh no!"

Fermor let go her arm at once. He had been much annoyed that evening. "As you please," he said. "I only want you to take your proper place among the company. But just as you please."

"Oh yes, of course," said Violet, hurriedly; "let us go there at once."

"Which then is it to be? I dare say there will be no getting a chair *now*," said he. "Was there any mistake about the hour?"

"No," said her sister, calmly; "the carriage did not come, and Violet's headache was so bad, that at one time we thought of giving it up altogether."

Fermor did not answer.

"Here is a chair now," he said presently. "We must go through a quadrille, I suppose, for the benefit of these people here, or we shall furnish them with some food for talk. I shall come back in a moment." But one of the secret causes of Fermor's bitterness was that the public were not so absorbed in his motions as he expected.

As he moved away, Pauline touched him gently. There was an imploring look in her large eyes. She said, "This is a

very trying place for her. Be a *little* soft with her; encourage her, and she will do very well. You must promise me."

Fermor could not trust himself to speak. This was more of the family "intimidation." He had no reply ready, so he merely bowed and strode away.

Sir Hopkins and Showers passed him, arm in arm.

There was a sort of ritual and a "form" of thanksgiving chanted through that night. It was heard at all corners. It was charming, delightful, delicious! Young ladies fell into little contortions of rapture. They never, in the course of their lives, had experienced anything to approach its enchanting character! From the hundred-and-one little processions made that night, backwards and forwards, under cool and tropical conditions, from ball to supper room, and from supper to ball room—the same anthem was raised. The beatific vision was found at last. So with the military showmen, who were busy with their duties all the night. They accepted these compliments with modest diffidence, brushing them away, as it were, like flies. "Oh, I say, come," would the bashful warriors repeat. "Good! You, indeed. You are chaffing me! You see—er—we know how to do it. That's the whole secret, you see." The devotee on his arm, however, received it as a grand and dazzling truth.

Fermor, a little softened, was making his way over to Violet, and generously publishing an amnesty for the past. Violet saw him coming, and the wistful look fled. Showers, with Miss Carlay on his arm, was drifted up near him. The low triumph on Showers's face was too much for Fermor—he *would* put him down—and he walked straight across to Miss Carlay.

The round fair honest face looked up at him hopefully, almost with delight. "I never expected to see you here," said Fermor. "Nor did I hear you were coming—though there was nothing surprising in that. I mean *my* not hearing it."

She smiled. "How were we to tell you?" she said gently. "We never see you now. You have given us up."

"I am very busy now," said Fermor. "I have given up vanities. I have forsworn all my old ways and pleasures. I have no right to amuse myself. I am to look the world in the face now, and who cares about me *now*?"

"I am very sorry, *very* sorry," said the girl, opening and shutting her fan. "I thought we were friends of yours, and you—bore with us so kindly."

"Oh yes," said Fermor, with artificial carelessness (he was

getting into one of the dramatic situations he loved), "that is all the old story, you know. It is very good of you to say so. But, after all, what does it reduce itself to? A book or so lent, an hour or so of my tediousness bestowed on you. This is the way we go through life. To-morrow you will be next door to some one else. And *his* figure will be refracted into heroic proportions. The day after, I shall be next door to some one else, and *she* will be refracted too. I have not told you half of my philosophy yet. You were right, after all, in dealing with me as the merest of acquaintances."

"I never dreamt of such a thing," she said, a little sadly; "and if you would take the trouble of explaining——"

"Really?" said Fermor, carelessly. "And you *are* curious to know?"

At this moment interposed Showers, eager, alarmed, and panting like a horse at the end of a long stage. "Now, Miss Carlay," he said, "we can go now. There is not such a crowd now, and we can reach the supper-room before it is opened."

Fermor lifted his eyes quietly to hers, and moved his chair a little. She drooped her eyes. There was a pause. The simplest, most unsophisticated girls are born with these ball-room artifices.

"But," she said, "Mr. Showers, it seems so crowded still. We shall never get through."

Showers urged it. "Do come," he said, holding out his arm ready bent. "I shall manage it, never fear."

She was so honest and natural, this girl, and saw he was so earnest, that on another occasion she would have gone with him at every risk of personal sacrifice. But Fermor's eyes were on her.

"Would not," she said, irresolutely—"would not a little later do as well? Say after the next dance. There, that's settled," she added, with gaiety.

Showers was deeply wounded. "Very well," he said, "very well."

Fermor stood up. "What!" he said, "after Mr. Showers has had the trouble of fighting his way through all that humanity to get to you! For shame, Miss Carlay. *That* is cruelty, if you like. Look at his arm waiting. No, no. Go. Do; for the mere decency of the thing. The flowers will be all withered if you go later. Surely, after Mr. Showers has had such trouble——No, I am sure you will."

And with a pleasant smile and a sort of half nod, as of encouragement to her, he moved gaily away. She looked after

him with a half-wounded, half-astonished expression, then set Showers's troubled heart at rest by going with him. Fermor, at the other end, watched them, smiling. He was infinitely pleased with himself.

Strauss's Valse was now winding out again. "He listened with half-closed eyes as the music seemed to sway up and down. Some floated by him as harmoniously as the music. Some one touched him on the arm. It was the brother of Violet.

"Charming music," said Fermor, languidly. "Listen, now. There, the subject comes in again."

"Yes," said the other, bluntly. "But it seems as if it has made you forget Violet altogether. You were to dance with her, were you not?"

Fermor, becoming hard and cold, lifted his eyes, as who should say, "Well? Granted."

"You were to dance with Violet," continued the other, more loudly; "and made a sort of point of it—to show her to the company, you said."

Fermor felt his colour rising at the *manner* of all this. "Well," he said; "I *intend* to do so. The night is scarcely over."

"Well; better do it at once," said the brother. "I tell you the truth, candidly—though it *is* only a trifle, these suspenses and agitations are *not* good for her. She has had too much of them lately. You know, as well as we do, she is too delicate to be trying experiments on. You insisted on her coming here."

"Trying experiments on!" said Fermor, his face darkening. I don't follow."

"Yes," said the other, more hard still. He always showed that he had no awe of Fermor. "She can't bear it. It is cruel. She has been accustomed to be watched and petted and treated with kindness among us all. It must be kept up, or any coldness would kill her."

Fermor's chest was heaving, but he dreaded the absurdity of quarrelling with any quasi relatives. "You will excuse me," he said, calmly, "if I cannot understand you."

"Then we ought to understand each other," said the other. "She is too precious to us to let ceremony stand in the way."

"This is scarcely the place to enter on these matters," said Fermor, bowing; "perhaps you would not mind concluding your remarks in the morning. As to the dance, you may reassure yourself and your sisters; I was just going. I assure you I require no inspiration in such matters."

He left young Manuel.

"Upon my word," he said to himself, "things are coming to a nice pass. To be schooled and lectured by her sister, I suppose I *must* put up with that; but from the brother I'll *not* take it. I must show them they have not got *quite* a poor soul among them. Upon *my* word! As for Violet, poor child, *she* is not accountable. But she is weak and foolish, and they do what they like with her."

He was thinking whether he should go at once to take her. Poor child, after all there should be indulgence for her, and she was not responsible for these people about her. Raised seats in tiers went round the room, and very far off he could see her face looking out anxiously and painfully, as from a rock, expecting succour. It looked so piteous, that he thought he would at once walk across to her.

But here was Showers and his partner, homeward-bound from the private view of the supper-room. Showers was pettish. He said his colonel wanted him. She was very silent, and looked up at Fermor now and then timorously, as if half shy, half afraid. He was gay and unconcerned. Just then Picini from his gallery intoned Strauss once more. It was one of the sad songs sung by a cornet. "Do you hear," said Fermor; "one of those divine valse. You should be dancing, not sitting down, to such music. Where is the wretched being who has dared to be late? Shall I fetch him?"

"It is Mr. Showers," she said; "but I am sure he will not come. I am keeping you. You are dying to dance it."

"Well, I am," said he, "but as for looking for any one in *this* place——"

"How charming!" she said; "I would give the world to be dancing it."

"But you are engaged," said Fermor, gravely. "We must respect these little obligations. As for *me*, I have served my turn. I am fit only for being carried out, like the old Indians, and left with a pot of rice on a mountain."

"No, no!" she said; "*indeed* I don't think so."

"I don't mean literally," he said, gravely. "Well, then, putting off that ceremony for a few days," added Fermor, in his gayest mood, "suppose we *do* try this valse? Ah! but Mr. Showers!"

"Oh, don't mind him!"

"Don't mind *him*!" said Fermor. "What, Showers, the favoured, the admired, the man whom the world is talking of

and congratulating! What, not mind *him*? Can you be serious?"

She coloured. "It is all his fault," she said, rising. "Would you mind, now——"

In a moment Strauss had engulfed them. They were floating round. Fermor talked through the music (and through the dancing), as they do in melodramas. Curiously, he had forgotten, for the moment, other duties and other faces. No matter, the night was long.

"The surprise of seeing you here to-night! said Fermor, still in motion. "I had no idea of it. I begin to suspect a mystery. *Do* explain."

Half a dozen turns more. Then she answered, with great confidence, "I wished—that is, papa and I wished—that you should see me in another character than that of an invalid. You must have been *quite* weary of me in that shape."

The face of Fermor, which was over Miss Carlay a foot or so, smiled with complacent triumph.

A few more turns. "I have never seen *her* yet," said she. "Miss Violet. She is here, is she not?"

"Oh yes," said he. "In the other room, I believe. And now tell me—why are you so curious?"

She did not answer this direct question. "*Do* let us look for them."

But Fermor was not so eager. "We shall find them," he said, "when this crowd clears off a little. What boors these countrymen are! Sir, *would* you? You are destroying this lady's dress." This to a fatty harmless man, who staggered back in dreadful confusion, with flames rushing to his face.

"I am afraid," she said, "this will be my only chance. For I don't know," she continued, "did we tell you" (she knew well she had not) "that we are leaving this place in a few days?"

Fermor hastily drew rein, halted at a pillar. "Going away!" he said.

"Yes," she said. "I am *very* sorry, oh, *so* sorry. But we are obliged."

"Oh, of course," said Fermor.—"Why not?" he was almost going to add; "you are not obliged to give notice to the whole parish."—"And when was this sudden move thought of, pray?"

"Papa says so. Oh, I am *so* sorry. I was beginning to like this place. Every one—that I knew, at least—was so kind to me."

"I am sorry, too," said Fermor, "to lose my neighbours. These things can't be helped. We must come and go—it is a law of the nineteenth century. We shall meet sometime and somewhere, I suppose."

"I hope so," she said.

"And poor Showers," he continued. "I hope you won't be angry—you know you have taught me to speak freely to you. What is to become of *him*? I was under the impression—at least, his manner and behaviour made me think so—that really there was something 'auspicious,' as the newspapers say, on foot. No? Is he to follow? or to wait, or——"

"Absurd!" she said, eagerly. "What ridiculous stories! I dislike him more than any one I have seen for years."

"Astonishing! Amazing!" said he. "And now," he continued, smiling, "who is there, as a matter of mere curiosity, that you *like* better than any one you have seen for years?"

Again here was the bird in the net of the fowler, as Fermor wished it to be. The bird fluttered, grew nervous, did not answer; but would have answered presently, when Mr. Carlay came up. "It is time to go away," he said.

Fermor took her down-stairs. "You must tell me these secrets another time. I may be useful to consult," he said, as he put on her cloak. "I shall certainly call in to-morrow;" then went back jubilant; then he thought, with a start, of Violet. For though the night *was* long, he had detained her a little. But the wistful face was gone from the rock. He could not find them anywhere. "Gone in to supper, I suppose," he thought, with unreasonable resentment. He was turning away when he was touched on the arm.

"Good gracious! Hanbury! Mr. Hanbury?" Fermor said, "I was told that you were gone away, and that you had made all your farewells in due form."

"I have come back," said the other, coldly; "and it seems not a bit too soon."

"That is for yourself, of course," said Fermor, now relapsing into himself; "at least, so far as I can make you out. Excuse me, I am going to have some supper."

Hanbury happily crushed and repulsed, Fermor went, had supper, and drank champagne. He was very elated with the events of that night—with the dramatic events; he had acted the *Jeune Premier*. As he was putting the flask down, he felt

a lowering face on him, like a cloud overhead. "What, followed me here?" he said, smiling. "Going to have some supper? Try that—you know I am host here."

The other put him away, as it were impatiently, with his hand. "Fermor, I have been here," he said, "the whole evening. And I have seen it all."

Fermor laid down his glass on the table, and said, "Indeed!"

"Yes," said the other, speaking very fast, "from the beginning of the night to the end. It was *very* cold and cruel. I could not have believed it, if any one had told me. But I am glad I am here myself. I should never have gone away."

"Now, if I might ask," said Fermor, trying to steady his voice, "what does all this mean?"

"I never saw such a change!" said the other. "It makes my heart bleed to look at her. Poor, poor child! Oh, Fermor, you ought to blush. They have gone home wretched. You will kill her!"

"This is getting unbearable," said Fermor, losing all patience; "it *must* be stopped. Do *you* think you have a right to come and lecture me? I suppose you have received your instructions. But I tell you what, Mr. Hanbury, I am too old to be schooled *now*, by you or any one else. Your brusque and honest candour must select some other object for its confidence—it is disagreeable to me. Upon my word we are coming to a charming pass."

"Oh," said the other, just as excitedly. "You must hear the truth at all risks! I suppose you think, because there are two poor helpless girls, with a more helpless mother——"

"Then *you* shall hear the truth too," said Fermor, turning round on him angrily. "You shall hear, that it is exceedingly improper to thrust yourself into my concerns. A very great liberty! There! This fine candour and manly qualities won't be your privilege, I can tell you. I look on your interference as *exceedingly* ill judged, and, if it is pursued further, I shall have to give you a serious lesson, my good friend." (Fermor threw all the insult of voice and manner he could muster into this speech.)

"And you can speak to me in this way after your conduct," said the other, also angry. "Very well——"

Two arms opened between, in gentle expostulation. "Hush! hush! My good friends," said Sir Hopkins, "you are talking very loud. You don't want the whole room, I am sure, to assist at this little discussion, eh?" Some stray men who had

dropped in—now that work was nearly over and they had earned their crust—for a solitary and substantial repast, had been drawing near, attracted by the sound of loud voices.

"Hush!" said Sir Hopkins again. "We can talk this over in the morning. Come with me, Charles. This way, down towards this chicken salad. Everything here seems excellent. Champagne, please. No, not in *that* glass. There; thanks. Now I think I am complete." And stooping down over his supper, Sir Hopkins said, in a low voice, filtered, as it were, through his chicken and his salad, "Admirable, Charles! I heard the whole. You cut him up like a melon."

"Such a thing!" said Fermor, still furious. "Everybody seems to think they are entitled to bring me to book. I believe he is set on—employed by the family—for this work."

"Is there any bread, I wonder?" Sir Hopkins said, looking up and down the table anxiously. "I dare say you have remarked, at balls, the bread always gets away, behind somewhere. Ah! my little rustic! was *she* here to-night?"

"Ah! that's the cry *now*," said Fermor, indignantly; "wasting away. I, of course, wearing her into the grave."

"What nonsense!" said Sir Hopkins. "Who says this? The sister, I suppose?"

"Exactly, sir. Always to this one tune. I am getting sick of it."

"Ah!" said Sir Hopkins, "fine woman that, but knows what she is about. Can see that in her eye. *She* will pull the whole family through the world. Mark my words, settle them all well, even to the mother, *I* know the sort of woman exactly. I dare say takes a little of the schoolmistress on her. Now *may* I give you a scrap of advice. You are a man of the world, and I may speak freely to you."

"Oh," said Fermor, coldly, "your experience is always useful."

"Yes," said the other. "But, on principle, *never* let them school you. On principle, mind. They will encroach until you find yourself growing down every day into a child. You know this yourself as well as *I* do."

"Exactly, sir," said Fermor, eagerly; "that is the view that has guided me all through."

"I thought so," said the other. "(My dear Charles, there was a Seltzer-water bottle here a moment ago, and some one has carried it off. Thanks.) No, I am serious. You are quite right in making a stand against these people. I assure you, I

tell you candidly, I quite admire the spirit, as well as the clever diplomacy, that has regulated your behaviour. You see I have been watching. And as for the *capital* manner in which you disposed of that rough person just now, who, no doubt, as you said, *was set on* by others to that particular duty, it quite commands my admiration. You want no advice, my dear fellow. Who *are* they, by-the-bye?" he added, growing a little confused.

"I don't know, I am sure, sir," said Fermor. "It is rather too late, I fear, to be thinking of *that*, now."

Sir Hopkins looked up at him from his chicken salad. "No, Charles, that is quite a false impression. Even after a treaty is signed, we—that is, nous autres—can have 'a rectification,' as it is called. We can never be too late with anything—excepting death and actual marriage. Never, Charles."

The ball was breaking up. The company were drifting away like sheep. The ground was open and clear as a prairie, and a few untired couples were flying round wildly. Picini, fresh as at the beginning, was leading on one of his most desperate galops. It seemed to echo down like music in a church, the floor was so clear.

Shawls and opera cloaks were being put on. A universal hymn and responses were heard on all sides. "Such a delightful evening! Enjoyed ourselves *so much*!" To which military choristers in scarlet surplices would answer, in full acclaim, "Aw! so pleased, aw! Quite glad you liked it—'pon word am!" as though under a tacit suspicion of 'insincerity, and the speaker was anxious to clear himself.

Fermor, coming out full of pride and excitement, met his mother and sisters at the door, in the act of being shawled and clothed. They were in the hands of a band of admiring men. "Such a charming evening!" whispered Lady Laura, whom long service had trained to business, and who always brought a large white bag, easily recognisable, and marked "L.F." ("Your worsted shoes, my dear, are at the bottom of the bag.") "Mr. Piper, Charles, has been *so* kind. Only for him I don't know *how* we should have managed. Charles! Mr. Piper—my son!" And Charles found himself introduced to a bashful child, little older than one of the regimental drummer-boys. "Next brother to Sir Thomas. No children," she whispered Charles. "Quite taken with Alicia." Alas! at every entertainment there was to be always the typical man, who was "quite taken with Alicia."

"By the way," she continued, "we were all admiring that

striking-looking girl you were with. Who is she, my dear? Such style, and quite an air. I was struck by her. The only decent person I have seen here. Come, dears. Mr. Piper; you won't forget? Any day, at three. You will always find *some* of us in."

Fermor turned back into the rooms again. It was over. Picini was disbanding his forces. Sleeping violins were being tucked away in snug green-baize cradles. Fermor looked up at them. Major Carter came glissading to him over the smooth floor.

"Dear Captain Fermor," he said, "I am so glad to meet you. Going home? Would you mind letting me walk with you? I have something to tell you."

Fermor was gracious. "Come in here and have some wine."

"Most kind of you. I should like it of all things. That man Hanbury—where is he?—he was skulking about here just now."

Fermor helped himself. He had not had too much, nor was he going to have too much; but good wine made him talk with eagerness, and a sort of fervour.

"I know," he said. "He has honoured me with some of his instructions. But I fancy I gave him a lesson instead."

"I heard," said the major, smiling. "It was admirable, I am told. So quietly and gentlemanly, and, at the same time, so determined. He has not got over it yet."

"The idea!" said Fermor. "There's a set of them that think they have a right to come up one after the other and lecture me. I won't stand it, Major Carter. I have made up my mind this night. I won't stand it. What relation has this man to me? What right has he, because he is a great strong animal, and rides strong horses—ay, and can ride gentlemen down, too—to come and hector me? I won't take it from any man."

"Oh, of course," said the major, filling his glass, "he has his instructions. It's only natural. He is still kept *on*, you see. Uncommon clever *that* of them."

"Ah! you think so too?" said Fermor, eagerly. "Do you know, the same idea occurred to me, and to Sir Hopkins."

"I was sure you would see it in that way," said the major, selecting a bon-bon in the shape of a mushroom. "I suppose he was sent for."

"Sent for!" said Fermor, scornfully. "They may send for a dozen more like him. But that won't do."

They were now getting their coats and hats.

"By the way, Showers—ah, Captain Fermor!" and Major Carter shook his head profoundly. He had a young man's hat and a young man's cape, and, under the lamps, looked as fresh as any young man. "I met him going out, absolutely raving and imprecating. I never saw such a beating! You have thrashed him—morally."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Fermor, smiling.

They were now in the street. It was half-past four, and very cold, clear, and bright.

"Would you take my arm?"

Fermor did so graciously.

"Ah, you have known me only a very short time, and I have no right to speak freely about your affairs. I know you don't permit it, even with men who are old friends, and I must say I admire that reserve and restraint in you. But I will say I am sorry—I am."

"You mean——?" said Fermor.

"I mean, I am sorry to see the way your generous conduct has been received. I don't like it," said the major, with growing warmth. A man does a chivalrous thing; there are people by to work on his pity and appeal to his sympathies. I understand *that* sort of pressure. But he shouldn't be taken advantage of. No. I confess I took another view at the beginning; so did Sir Hopkins; so would any man of the world. But that is the way with a certain class of people. They will always encroach."

Fermor did not resent this free view of his affairs. "It is not so bad as that. I suppose they mean well. Yet I am afraid there *is* something in what you say," he said.

"If," continued Major Carter, expostulating, "they were of quality, one might put up with a good deal, but when we hear such stories——"

"Oh, I know all *that*," said Fermor, drawing himself up sensitively. "I ascertained all that beforehand. The—er—wine business, and all that. Younger sons of the best families have often been put into that sort of thing."

"No—I did not mean that," said the major; "but really I feel a delicacy in touching—but I have correspondents everywhere, and I confess *some* stories have reached me."

"*Indeed!*" said Fermor, eagerly. "Of what description, pray?"

"Oh, I had rather not. People write me everything. This was from old Foley, who served in Spain. *Some other time.*"

"Oh!" said Fermor, excitedly, "if there was anything like

concealment in the business, I *never* could bear *that*. No feelings of pity or regard would stand in my way."

"We shall see about it another time," said the major. "How cold it is! I declare here are my lodgings! You see *I* have my latch-key like the young fellows. Good night!"

"Good morning!" said Fermor.

"Ha, ha! very good, *very* good," said the major, laughing heartily. "Only for my known character, what things would be said of me! Good morning, then!"

This was the end of the Eastport ball. For many people in the Eastport colony it was an epoch to look back on. To Eastport girls it seemed like their first pantomime; Eastport youths it hopelessly unsettled. Young Mr. Piper, a military "child," and whose years should have protected him from "undue influence," was sent away home, raging with a frantic passion for Alicia Mary. That virgin had at last struck fire. But in Fermor it had wrought the most striking change of all. In the morning he looked back at the land on which he had been standing the evening before, as it were across a river, and the Manuel Family had not come over with him.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

"JANE," THE FAIRY GODMOTHER.

THE night of that Eastport festival, which for many young girls in Eastport was a night of sweet and exquisite dreams, in which lovely scarlet angels floated quite glorified, was for Violet the most wretched of her life. All her thoughts were seething and boiling in that small head; her bed seemed to be turned into a furnace; and when day came, and the steady daylight of nine o'clock, she rose up exhausted and trembling, with a worn face, but with eyes that sparkled like the lamps of the night before.

Pauline—the anxious sister—came into Violet's room as soon as she heard her stirring. She found her hot and flushed. There was a little wildness, too, in her eyes. She had, in truth, never slept.

"Darling Violet," said her sister, going up to her, "this is dreadful. You will wear yourself into the grave. Your heart cannot bear it, I know it cannot."

"I am better this morning," she said, "much better—if I could only make myself sleep."

Pauline looked at her, irresolute as to how she should begin. "We have been thinking and talking over that ball of last night; and now, my dear darling Violet, this is to be considered, and is worth considering. You were very happy a short time ago—we were all very happy—until certain things took place, and you are not strong, and much anxiety or sorrow would wear you out. Now, dearest, is it not better, before it is *too* late, to have courage to go back? I *fear* we have made a mistake. *We*, I say, who ought to have been more sensible, and to have known better. Now what we have thought is this—and it is a cruel thing, darling, to propose—would it not be better, after last night, to have done with this—altogether?"

Violet's glistening eyes had been widening and distending all this time. It was only at the last word that she caught her sister's meaning. She broke out in a fright.

"No, no! I cannot—I could not. And to come from me! No, I *could* not, indeed," she added, piteously.

"Ah," said Pauline, in tones of the softest compassion, "that is it, darling. Is it not better that it *should* come from you, than that——"

"What!" said the other, excitedly. "Do you know anything? Do you believe it? Do you——"

She was so excited that her sister said to her, "No, no! it is only that I *fear*. You know you said it yourself last night. We, who have seen a little more of the world than you, dearest, understand the meanings of little signs, which you would pass by. Indeed, it is better, Violet, that you should see it now, than see it later."

"Then you *have* heard something. He told you last night," said Violet, distractedly. "Oh, I had a presentiment that this was coming!" And she lay back on the sofa and panted nervously, and a look of scared terror came to her face that quite alarmed Pauline. She ran to her.

"It is nothing," she said. "I am all wrong, indeed I am. I know nothing, and have heard nothing—upon my word and honour, as I stand here, I have not. It is only some of my foolish sense and caution. Won't you believe me when I tell you so?"

The other raised herself, drew a slow sigh of relief, then gave a child's smile.

"Oh, you so terrified me," she said. "I am getting so foolish

and nervous. But it is nonsense, all nonsense," she added with a pretty wisdom. "I know Charles so well now—better than you, Pauline. And he has these ways, which are ways of his own. And you *know* he has told us over and over again that he hates that public exhibiting and 'engagements on view,' as he calls it. I thought it all over, and made it out quite clear. He never does anything without a purpose, and I shouldn't be surprised," she added, with a sudden flash of gaiety, "if he really was what he calls trying me. Ah, there it is!"

Her sister was so relieved at this change from a scene she dreaded, and almost delighted that she accepted this far-fetched fancy, with her arms about the fluttering Violet, even fortified it. She was sure it was so; was confident that out of his sensitiveness he had planned this little experiment. And presently the sisters, by mutual encouragement, had worked it into actual pleasant proof of attachment and devotion; and Violet, as if then was now, finding something to rejoice at, said, with alacrity, that she would now come down.

The maid who had—now a long time ago—thought Fermor "lovely," had come in, busy with shutters and curtains. She saw Violet's worn face, the weary lines of pain upon her cheeks, and the tightened look about her forehead. More significant still were her strained eyes. She was a "smart" girl, and glowing ribbons always were fluttering from her caps like pennants from a mast. All through she had taken a deep interest in the love affair, and, strange to say, knew perfectly all the ebbs and flows of that uncertain current. For Fermor she had the deepest admiration. Could any one have introduced the well-known Apollo Belvidere into her associations, that famous type of plastic beauty would have exactly satisfied her as a standard for her hero. She yearned for some such type, and yet the hero himself, when she threw open the door for him, hurried past her upstairs, not rude or blunt, but wholly unconscious of her, and of all the ribbon-flags with which she was purposely "dressed."

She had long guessed the state of things. The flags were often at the mast-head for a salute; but the personage to be saluted did not come. The two sisters were fond of her, and talked with her often. She amused them with legends of the ladies and gentlemen of her own sphere. Not that they needed gossip—but when she was busy with their dresses, and Violet sat with her long hair like a nun's veil on her head, "Jane," busy with the brush, poured out a stream of curious speculations,

odd rumours, and dark suspicions which were rife in the society she affected. But in Violet she had a greater confidence.

She had sore suspicions about this business; and being, after all, an honest girl, was a little troubled in mind. At the same time she was convinced that the whole affair had been "mis-managed." The hero she judged indulgently, as being only like other heroes, in all ranks. But there were certain little rules and traditions, without which affairs of this kind would never go well. These she had seen applied with success, in the instances of lovers down-stairs. Down-stairs, sighing coachmen and eligible valets, in the progress of their courtship, were treated with studied scorn and elaborate contumely, when *other* ladies and gentlemen were present; and this, it was felt, showed the power of the cruel fair, and piqued the ardour of the swain. With wonder and surprise Jane saw the total neglect of these wholesome principles, and from the beginning augured the worst.

Before that morning she had learnt the whole history of the ball. Through the interest of Fermor's esquire—a pleasant officer with whom she was intimate—she had secured the privilege of being present. That gentleman had even gone further, and with a soldier's thoughtfulness had borne her secret cakes, and yet more secret refreshment. The maid had therefore seen the whole from a gallery, and she was determined that morning to "speak her mind" while there was yet time.

Violet was a little hurried and excited in her speech as she dressed. "Did I look well, Jane, last night?" she asked. "They told me I did, and I am sure we did all we could."

"Lovely, lovely, miss!" said Jane; "but I am afraid you're not well to-day."

"I could not sleep," said Violet, nervously; "never closed my eyes once the whole night. I don't know what is the reason."

"It was a beautiful ball, miss," said Jane, abruptly, and brushing with great activity.

"Oh, you were there!" said Violet, with a little start. "To be sure, I knew you were."

"Yes, miss; Mr. Bates, that is, the captain's gentleman, was good enough to put me in the front seat of the gallery. (He has great interest, you know.) And I saw you, miss, the whole night."

"Yes," said Violet, hurriedly; "I did not care to dance; I had a headache; I was dying to be at home again. Oh, Jane,"

she said, turning suddenly, "I am very wretched and miserable; and, Jane, what is to become of me?" And Violet began to sob hysterically.

Jane had laid down her brushes, and was soothing her like an infant. "Now, now, miss, you must not. This is what wears you so—don't think of it, it will all come all right."

Violet was now in spasms of agitation. She got up suddenly, and went over to the bed, on which she flung herself. The maid looked on in sore distress. Not for many minutes could all her soothing take effect.

Poor Violet felt she could confide in her, as indeed she might. "O Jane, Jane, and before them all too, was it not dreadful! Not that I mind *that*. But I fear—I do so fear—that they have been changing him to me—I know they have."

"No, no, miss," the maid said with a smile of superiority. "Not at all, not at all! you make too much of it, miss, indeed you do. I know what it is."

Violet became earnest, and looked at her steadily. "Ah! What is it?" she said.

Jane was thinking of the tactique popular below. "Why it's all wrong, miss, you know. The thing has been mismanaged. I've seen it all along."

So poor Violet, thus catching eagerly at any plank, and beseeching her to tell, Jane became like an old fairy godmother, whom this young creature had come to consult, and to get advice. With great wisdom (and with some difficulty in the choice of words, for Jane had delicacy), and at leisurely length, the maid expounded the true secret of success in such affairs, and the little old-fashioned amatory cruelties which still obtained in the servants' hall.

"It don't do, you see, miss," said the fairy godmother, "to let a gentleman come too easy, or come too often. They don't like it themselves, don't the gentlemen. Bless you, my dear miss, it's as old as the hills. There are days," added Jane, as an illustration, "when I make believe not to see Mr. Bates, it might be in the street, or it might be on the road; and though I don't pretend to say that there's anything going on *there*, still, miss, you can have no manner of idea how he does take it. You see, when they have it all their own way, they come to take it as easy as—anything."

This seemed like truth to Violet, to whom anything like a little salvation in this emergency was welcome. Her eyes distended, and her breath came and went as the fairy godmother

explained the mystery. The introduction of Mr. Bates as an illustration to the workings of the charm on him especially, did not import any burlesque into the matter. She even began to regard him with an interest which would have amazed that simple soldier. She was told how on certain days he was received with an unbounded affection, purposely exaggerated to lead him into some slight forwardness; which, on the next occasion, would be seized on as an opening for treating him with the most mortifying and insulting neglect. A short course of this fitful treatment was enough to "take him down"—not only to take him down, but to reduce him to an unmanly and grovelling degradation. From whence he would be as unexpectedly—and as unreasonably—lifted from this level to the sunshine of unbounded favour by a mere smile.

"But," said the fairy godmother, coming more to the point, "if there was another gentleman, miss, as could be found—and I know of such as could easily be got, and willing, and whose place, indeed, by rights it *ought* to be—that were the *real* way!"

Violet's eyes opened still wider. She coloured a little, for she understood.

The captain, went on the fairy godmother, was a charming gentleman, so fine and so high in his manners. But all gentlemen were the same in *that* point. They required to be "kept up and stirred." Now, couldn't Miss Violet just try it a little—ever so little—and see how it would answer? Not to be just "quite so ready," but more "stand-off," and, above all, just "lean ever so little" to that good but "soft" gentleman, Mr. Hanbury. Mark her words, if in a day or two the remedy had not the most startling result.

The child Violet listened, first with curiosity, then with hope, then with confidence, finally with devotion. Here was a reasonable chance. She caught at it. She began to think herself a mere infant, whose own folly was the cause of all; but here was a sensible woman come to advise her, but happily not called in too late.

"Now, miss," said the godmother, "there's another thing. We might have the two gentlemen together here of a night, just a nice little party of a dozen to look on; for it's the *being* done *before people* that makes all the effect. No gentleman, miss, likes to see another gentleman put up before him, where there's people by. As sure as I am standing here, miss, if you only get your mamma to have a few people in to tea, and have

the two gentlemen together, and be a little partial to Mr. Hanbury, *giving him his tea first*," said the adviser, mysteriously, "or sitting with him in a corner, or even," added Jane, with a little hesitation—for she was not certain whether the mark of favour was so firmly established above as it was below stairs—"setting a flower in his button-hole as sure as you do this, everything will be well in the morning." More particular details, then, of this infallible nostrum she then disclosed, leaning on them so earnestly, that she had Violet gazing at her as intently as though she were a physician telling of a certain cure for illness. The physician even inspired such hopes and confidence, that Violet began to question, a little nervously, whether that little gallantry about the flower and button-hole—on which her adviser seemed to rest above all—might not be introduced, with, of course, some dexterity. The poor child was so trusting, and so accustomed to lean upon every one for assistance, that it was easy to persuade her. So when her dressing was over, she had been changed into a little conspirator; for from the straightforward Pauline—but who, indeed, was conspiring in her own way—it was thought best to conceal the whole.

Early that morning came in Hanbury. They had not seen him the night before. This was a thin, sad, unhearty man, a sort of changeling Hanbury.

Pauline started. "Come back?" she said.

"Yes," he answered, gloomily; "and you will own, not an hour too soon." He then told her of his quarrel with Fermor. "He has shown himself in his true colours," he added, speaking fast, "for which we should all be thankful. I have found him out to be what I always thought him, a cold, calculating, heartless fine gentleman. I have given him a lesson, and shall teach him a little more yet."

Pauline had listened with gathering wonder and even dread.

"Oh, folly! folly!" she said. "What *have* you been doing?"

"Doing!" said he; "I have saved *her*. I have at least *that* to comfort me; I have been of *some* use. You think I have some selfish view. Ah, no! I have long since given over that dream."

"Oh, what have you been doing?" said Pauline again. "I know you did not mean it, but everything is turning out so unfortunate. Surely, to quarrel with him—with Violet's husband—you might have known——"

"But," he said, "you cannot mean—you don't suppose, after last night, that this will go on! Though women believe to the end! But I know what his game is."

"Hush! hush, said Pauline, rising; "we must not think of this. Oh, you should not have done that. *He* will think we have set you on, and he is so proud he will resent. No. Oh, Hanbury, cannot you see that Violet's whole soul and life is bound up in him? She believes in him still, and *will* believe through everything."

Hanbury looked at her, confounded. He gave a groan. "It is to be always the same with me—the same stupid blundering John Hanbury to the end. I am very miserable and very unfortunate. And what am I to do?"

"Lose not a moment; go to him at once," said Pauline, hurriedly, "we can only repair the mischief as well as we can."

"Go to him—and after that?—"

"Go—go to him and tell him you are sorry. You know how men make these things up."

"Sorry!" said he, a little distractedly. "Oh, I can't do that! You don't know all that has passed—the words he used to me, which I *could* not pass over. *Indeed* I could not."

"But it must be set right. You don't know what mischief you may have done." Then, as Hanbury seemed irresolute, she added, after a pause: "I thought you would have done anything for Violet."

"What does it matter," he said, "after all? First wretchedness, now degradation. I care very little now. With all my heart, then."

"Ah, if you had seen her," said the sister, earnestly, "how her heart is set on this affair, how her life is bound up—how her little soul is wearing away——"

"To be sure," said he, eagerly. "How selfish I have been. Of course it must be done. I will go at once."

"Always generous, noble, kind," said Pauline, taking his hand. "*You* talk of selfishness. At this moment I blush for myself. But we know not where to turn to, and moments are precious and slipping away, and this is our treasure, our only treasure."

Then Hanbury hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

AMENDE.

FERMOR, who had risen late, looking back uneasily to the night before, as to a strange country through which he had driven, and brooding over his injuries, was walking up and down his room. He was still on the other side of the river, looking across; and on the opposite bank were the same figures standing there, but with another light on them. In fact, they were *other* figures.

A letter was presently brought in to him. It was from Sir Hopkins Pocock, and ran:—

“DEAR CHARLES,—Could you spare me twenty minutes this morning?
“H. P.”

Fermor lost no time in going. He found Sir Hopkins at his desk, with official blue paper before him, and the papers in the despatch-box overflowing their banks—a sure symptom of heavy business. He laid down his pen and smiled.

“Well, Charles. How do you feel after your ball? Really done uncommonly well. Wonderful! I was really greatly pleased. I have not tasted a better mayonaise I don’t know when.”

Fermor said he was glad that he was pleased; then looked restlessly at the overflowing papers.

“I have been a good deal over the world, as you know,” continued Sir Hopkins, leaning back in his chair, and laying the tips of his fingers together as though he had sent for Fermor specially to tell him this. “And men out *there* are always getting up things of that kind. But they break down. Why? What would you say, now, was the reason?”

Fermor moved restlessly in his chair. “It is hard to say,” he said. “By the way, sir, I think you had something to mention——”

Sir Hopkins suddenly drew in his chair to the table, and became grave and official.

“I have this morning,” he said, “been favoured with a despatch from her Majesty’s Under Secretary of State for the Colonies—the Right Honourable Harding Hanaper, M.P. That despatch is dated yesterday morning. It would seem, Charles,” he added, becoming suddenly unofficial, “they desire my services once more. An important dependency—the name I am not at liberty

to mention—will be vacant in a week or two, and I leave this to-morrow morning."

"Yes, sir," said Fermor nervously.

"Well," said Sir Hopkins. "I sent for you because I knew it would interest you. I dare say it is about the most important news that has come to this little settlement for many months. No one," he added, looking at the large envelope with reflective complacency, "would suppose that this little paper contained such grave tidings and such responsibility. Of course there are drawbacks. Now they will begin worrying me out of my life with applications. It is almost as bad as the new manager of a theatre. Fancy, only yesterday came a letter, in anticipation, from my old friend Showers—of course about his young fellow. I can't well refuse him. I am writing to him by this post."

Pride and mortification came to Fermor's face in the shape of colour. He rose to go.

"Candidly, my dear Charles, I am a little disappointed about you; for I have a great opinion of your sense, and I *did* think there was in you all the matériel of a diplomatist; 'pon my soul I did. But—you know—when I heard of that—hem—marriage of yours, and saw that when I asked, 'Where is the money?' and got no answer—'Where was the love and folly and that sort of thing?' and got no answer—and 'Where was the connexion?' and heard something about a wine merchant—when, in short, I found the business could be accounted for by no known reason on—the—face—of God's earth," he added, excitedly, making these words fall like little sharp taps of a hammer, "why, I shook my head and said: 'He will hardly do for a diplomatist; he will hardly do for me. Or he doesn't like it, or want it perhaps.' There, Charles! There's the candour you always like. But it is the truth, on my soul!"

Fermor stood biting his lip and colouring. He was deeply hurt. He did not answer for a few moments.

"Not like it! why if there is a thing in the world—— But I was afraid of this, sir," he said, at last. "But I see it is hopeless to think of altering your opinion."

"Good gracious!" said Sir Hopkins, starting up and seizing him by the hand. "How you do misconstrue one! Am I not your relative? Do you suppose I would not like to do all I could for you? But I *must* look to myself. It is a load of responsibility. How could I be dragging about with me an impoverished Assistant—we are speaking candidly recollect—with

what is called 'a struggling family.' These poor girls always have large families; they can't help it. I couldn't do it."

"But you don't consider, sir," said Fermor, fretfully, "a man's position. His honour is often engaged! You don't know everything. It is impossible to resist an appeal made to your sympathy and even compassion. It is not so easy as you think, sir."

Sir Hopkins's lip curled. "Now, now, my de—ar fellow—come! That sort of thing may do with boys of twenty. A delicate school-girl's tears! It is simply absurd among grown-up people. I can understand it at a ball, where the wine makes a man do many a foolish thing; but in broad daylight—If that is all you are going on, it is nonsensical. I tell you, if you were my son, this moment I would walk straight out of this house to those people, and settle it off in half an hour. It's arrant—shameful!—'pon my word it's shameful," Sir Hopkins added, with warmth.

Fermor stood there with his eyes fixed upon the ground. He felt full of foolishness and of shame in the presence of this sensible man who had seen the world.

"I have no business to talk on this matter to you, I know. Egad I have not. And it seems harsh and cruel and worldly, but I have your interest at heart, and the girl's too, I can tell you. O, I know the whole thing. It's a duty, Charles, as you have invited free speech in me, to set these things before you. Besides, who are they? Are they in Burke? No. Are they in the Blue Book? No. Where in God's name are they? Wine merchants! Heaven bless me! A whole French romance about wine merchants! Besides, those stories! They should be looked into. I don't mind stories about men. There were heaps flying about Lord Poolbeg; but about a whole family!"

"Stories! Ah! yes. But I never heard," said Fermor, eagerly.

"Of course you didn't," said his friendly adviser. "That would scarcely happen. You don't expect people of that sort to take you into the parlour, and say, 'My dear sir, there are such and such stories about us, which it is right you should know.' Scarcely, I think. No; ask Carter, who knows everybody, he has picked them up somewhere."

"Yes, he did hint something to me last night," said Fermor, growing excited.

"Naturally," said Sir Hopkins. "It is not pleasant to do

such things. I assure you I don't like it at this moment. But there—I must go back to my letters. Time and tide, you know—and the Under-Secretaries—wait for no man. At least, they'll blow you up afterwards. I am very glad I have spoken to you candidly. I should have gone away under a complete misapprehension, otherwise. I tell you what—if I can be of any use by way of advice or action, use me. And I tell you what besides—as I am writing to Harding Hanaper, I can mention your name if you like." Fermor made a faint protest. "Don't misunderstand me," said Sir Hopkins. "It is merely for precaution's sake, and binds you to nothing."

"Oh, sir," said Fermor, "you are so kind and so thoughtful to me. Indeed I wish I had consulted you earlier. The whole thing is such a complication. For instance, last night there was a man who I believe was attached to her before—before——"

"Before *you* came," said Sir Hopkins smiling. "Of course, every one in his turn. And you may, perhaps, be predecessor to some one else."

"A rough, rude, heavy fellow—Hanbury," continued Fermor. "And he, it seems, chose to bring me to account as *their* champion. I could not put up with *that*, and of course I *had* to repress him, very firmly, and with some strong language. I showed him, I think, that I was not to be intimidated."

"Quite right," said Sir Hopkins, "quite so. I saw it. It was very gross; and, I tell you, a not uncommon manœuvre. And you met him with spirit and firmness?"

"Yes, sir," said Fermor.

"Oh, then you'll have him with you this morning."

"How, sir?" said Fermor.

"*They'll* send him to make it up, and all that sort of thing. The move failed, you see. I shall be greatly surprised if they don't. I merely throw that out. Now, my dear boy, letters, letters! Under-Secretary waiting."

No wonder that Fermor, for long after, should think of his relative's almost miraculous powers of foresight, and acuteness of mental vision, with something like reverence—even with awe—for when he reached home, he actually found, waiting in his room, John Hanbury! who, exactly as had been prophesied for him, walked up to him with a sort of sad contrition, and said, with a humility that affected the other:—

"Fermor, I am sorry for what passed last night. I hope you will not think of it. I can say no more."

For the moment he was almost affected. It pained him to

see this poor rough creature laying himself in the dust so humbly, all through the strength of his unlucky attachment. Through the films of natural vanity, distrusts, suspicions, through which he saw most things, Fermor for a moment got a clear view of this honest bit of self-sacrifice. He grasped Hanbury's hand. "As you say," he said, "let us think no more of it. I was rough enough myself, last night, but have been much put out of late. You don't know how I am worried. We can't always keep a watch over ourselves."

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-FIFTH.

VIOLET'S LITTLE PLOTS.

PAULINE, when Violet had come down, was astonished at the change. Violet's eyes were as glittering as before, and she went about with a nervous vivacity, but the look of misery and hopelessness was gone.

Very soon this restlessness had worked itself to a point. "Dear Pauline," she said, as if asking a favour, "I am thinking of going out for a walk up to the library (my head is so hot), and taking Jane."

"To be sure, darling," said her sister, delighted that she was taking interest in such a thing as a library. "The very thing; and get yourself a nice amusing book." She assumed—that delicate sister—that Violet would prefer going without her, for they could not avoid coming to that one subject, and therefore she did not propose herself as a companion. But this was really the first step in Violet's little conspiracy. She had a curious and irresistible instinct that she would meet with some one of the characters with whom her little plot was to deal. And this is often a very sure and faithful instinct. Jane, who always associated every progress outside the house indistinctly with Mr. Bates, attended her with alacrity.

The librarian—gentlemanly and conversational—took a great interest in her, and had put by (the tenderest little attention that was in his power) a new and choice story for her. Thus, unhappily, was her business transacted only too speedily; and then Violet, indifferently skilled in all the devices of social life, began to talk against time, and therefore a little wildly.

The librarian talked professionally, as it were, and was glad

of the opportunity. "There's a book," he said, "I am keeping for Major Carter, 'The Virgins of Mayfair;' they say it is by Mrs. Mackenzie Tollemache. He is to call for it himself at one o'clock. The major knows the world so well," added the librarian with a smile.

But her instinct was not to fail her, for presently she saw John Hanbury, with a heavy gloom upon his face, smoking a cigar dismally, lounging past with heavy steps. He saw her in a second, and his face became a conflagration. Now, Violet felt, was the moment to get out her heavy cloak and dark lantern, if she ever *was* to be a conspirator. Hanbury had passed irresolutely, and then, turning, saw Violet's soft face looking out at him with encouragement and sympathy. He came back as if he had been called. Violet welcomed him with a warmth almost extravagant. Jane was looking on from the inner shop, and looking on with approval. So Violet had made her first step in the character of a conspirator.

Hanbury was confounded, and almost agitated at his reception. Strange thoughts came tumbling tumultuously through his brain, wild dreams for the future rose in his head. Could it be that she had at last seen *that other* in his true colours?

"Shall I take this?" said the library messenger, now going out and pointing to "The Virgins of Mayfair," who were on the ground bound together with strong twine. "No, no," said the librarian; "I see the major crossing."

Instantly Violet had become almost coquettish. "We never see you now, Mr. Hanbury," she said, softly. "You *used* to spare us an hour sometimes. But that was long ago." This was not very skilful, but it was wonderful for Violet, and did excellently for Hanbury, who could have prostrated himself there on the well-worn boards of the library.

Major Carter was looking in at the window at the title-pages of the new books.

"Indeed," said Hanbury, "you are *most* kind, only too good; but I thought——"

Now entered Major Carter, fresh from his window studies. He was astonished and delighted to meet Miss Violet. Little did he know the pleasure that was in store for him when he crossed over. Could he help her to choose a book? "You have kept that new thing for me, Mr. ——, all thanks. This is," to Violet, "one of Mrs. Tollemache's, whom we *all* know, so you can imagine why I was dying to see it."

In the presence of this skilful player Violet felt her histrionic

power a little chilled, but she thought of what was before her, and set herself to work with wonderful purpose and resolution. "No," she said; "Mr. Hanbury has always helped me. He will choose me something, for I believe he knows my taste." Poor Violet. This was spoken awkwardly enough, but it imposed on the two gentlemen. "I must go back now," added she, getting even bolder in her little strategy. "I am going to ask Mr. Hanbury to see me home. Jane has business—marketing, and what not."

Hanbury, scarcely knowing whether he was living or breathing, glowed a delighted consent, and this wonderful Violet, whom some fairy had metamorphosed into a perfect little intrigante, hurried into the back portion of the shop, and whispered her maid that she must walk after Major Carter and watch if he went near Brown's-terrace.

Hanbury was to know strange fluctuations in his treatment, for he had scarcely walked a hundred yards in this new tumult of happiness, when Violet apparently began to weary of his society. The worn lines began to show in her face, just as invisible writing ink comes out before a fire. "I won't take you any farther," she said; "indeed, no. It is very kind of you to have come so far. Please leave me here. Do. I *must* go by myself."

And thus Hanbury was left gasping in the road, quite dazed, and with his heart all filled with grief. Still there was consolation—something to turn over and think of, in that incomprehensible change of manner. Later in the day the maid came back, after being detained rather longer than her mission required. She brought good news, however, for the major had gone straight to Brown's-terrace, no doubt charged with the intelligence. Joyfully our Violet flew up-stairs, began to smooth her hair, and work at personal decoration. The excitement of both night and day had given a brilliancy to her face. Ribbons, lace, dress, ornaments, all of the best, were got out, for it was now certain that Fermor, having quaffed the elixir, would come—come in excitement and with all speed. Her sister saw the change with delight and wonder, but forbore to ask a single question—even to put out a hint. She ran up to her mother with the good news, and to enjoin caution.

"Violet has a little mystery of her own, poor child. It is all going well again, I can see. He has been writing, and, I suspect, will be here in a moment. I knew it was some mistake. Don't let us notice anything, mother dear, and I shall watch for

Louis and warn him against any of his blunt speeches." Mrs. Manuel, whose face was all arid and worn with old private sorrows, where tears seemed to have sunk for themselves water-sheds and gullies, smiled with some pleasure. Such news was lighting up *her* darkness.

Violet, below, was setting the room in order over and over again, to do honour to the king that was coming in state. Thus busy, she talked, and with a spontaneousness quite unusual.

"I was thinking, Pauline," she said at last nervously, from the window, and with her face to the garden, "of a little plan, a little scheme of *my own*"—an announcement received with genuine delight by her sister.

"To be sure, dear," she said; "let us hear it. Mamma will be delighted."

"I want," said Violet, still at the window, "to—to—give a little party. You know we have been here so long, and never——"

Pauline answered with genuine wonder. "A party, dear! Good gracious! No—why should we do that?"

"O, we must!" said Violet, turning round and hastily crowding a number of reasons together. "It is expected. We ought to have done it long ago. I am sure they all say so. O, Pauline, indeed, *indeed* we must, we cannot be mean and taking everything; and—and—I should so like it."

"But this is so odd," said her sister, still wondering. "I never thought you cared for it. And mamma, you know, she could hardly bring herself to——"

"O, *she* will," said Violet passionately. "Indeed, we must do it," she added, piteously; "it is the only thing I would ask. Indeed, *indeed* you will help me!"

Sisterly instinct had now at last divined that something more was asked for than a mere party, and Pauline was presently as eager as Violet.

But the shadows of evening began to gather, and she sat and made a pretence of reading, then of settling again, then of imaginary searches and inquisitions in her own room as imaginary, until the day was fairly gone. Then she became exhausted. The excitement could not carry her on. Light lines on her face began to come out, and she turned to her fairy godmother quite hopeless and helpless.

That counsellor was not without ready comfort. She wrapped her consolation up in the pithy saying about the time it required to build the city of Rome. The ways of "gentlemen" were almost as inscrutable as those of Providence. Certain experi-

ences connected with Mr. Bates had almost established the same truth. Leave it to time. To-morrow, miss, we should see. Rome was not, &c. But, the king was not to come *that* day. He had *not* drank of the elixir, which might be accepted as a reason such as it was. Major Carter, posting away to see him, had found him out. The king had gone in next door in all his glory to console yet another maid. While Violet was keeping her weary evening watch, with the greys and dusks descending about her like clouds, her lord was sitting beside a Moabitish woman, who had also, from the old instinct, decked herself for his coming. Their duet was to this effect.

"Shall you ever come back here again," said he. "Scarcely, I should say. Chance rarely brings friends again together at a place of this sort, at the same time. No, you shall be at the west when I shall be at the east. It is always the way."

"We are to go to the south of France," she said, speaking this to the corner of her dress. "Papa likes quiet and retirement. We shall become regular rustics, and live among the vines and honest peasants. You, we are told, are to have a different sort of life, out among the Eastern tribes, conquering and ruling. Something splendid and exciting."

"No," said Fermor, with some embarrassment; "nothing is settled as to that as yet. Of course I might—at any moment—if I choose."

"And you *will* choose," said she, timidly, but looking at him. "I am sure of it; I told papa so this morning."

Fermor smiled. "There was a refreshing naturalness about this girl that was always piquant. A new view at every turn of the road. "That would suit my nature, I suppose," he said, inquiringly, "ruling and conquering?"

She dropped her eyes again. Then, after a moment, looked at him. "I—I think so," she said.

"Quite right," he said, approvingly. (He had always a sort of paternal manner to her.) "Well answered! I should like being captain over slaves, in opening their brute intellects. I *would* relish the barbarous splendour of that country. No better background for anything like mind or intellect."

"You should go," she said, eagerly. "We should so like to hear of you."

"But what could you hear of me?" he said. "The ordinary routine account—despatches—minutes."

"No, no," she said; "something more. I know you would be famous."

"At least," he said, "you are anxious to get me out of the country. That is the fairest construction I can put on what you say."

"No, indeed," she said; "you misjudge me. If you *must* go, surely the south of France is as far removed from India—at least to all intents and purposes—as England. You will never come *that way*."

(This "nature" is really charming, he thought, because she makes no pretence to anything else.)

"We never know how things may turn out," he said. "I could no more tell where I shall be in three months' time than I could the age of the—age of the moon. It may be England, India—perhaps the south of France," he added, smiling. "It is all on the cards."

She smiled too. "You don't mean *that*?" she said.

"I can mean nothing," he said, importing one of his mysterious aphorisms, "where I know nothing. The vulgar gossips dispose of me just as they please. I assure you they know nothing. I confess you have read me right in one point. I *do* feel a call towards India. It *is* the country for me; and but for the absurd forms and formulas of our diplomatic service—No matter. I have not at *all* dismissed the notion, I assure you. People someway seem to *expect* me to go there. I have really very moderate abilities, which I am sure they overrate. I dare say, in the end, I shall have to go. But remember—the south of France is on the road to India."

"O, how charming it would be," said she, in one of her unconventional little bursts of delight. "Some morning, perhaps, we should hear of a strange gentleman at the gate, and we should be wondering, and then it would turn out to be you. Though, indeed, I should know for certain that it *was* you as soon as I heard there was a stranger."

"And do you mean to say," said Fermor, "that a morning call from a mere conventional being like myself—finding you, too, among all the attractions of the sweet south—would give you any pleasure? because, if so——"

"*Indeed* it would," she answered readily, and without hesitation.

Fermor had expected, in the course of nature, a little confusion and dropping of the eyes; still it was a bit of nature, and she was really delightful for that. It was like real fresh eau-de-Cologne after all manner of heavy perfumes. She was so simple and so natural, he could have gone on "playing" on her

for an hour more, with fresh entertainment, only he was obliged to go.

"Good-by! good-by!" he said, rising. "As I say, nothing is settled, and you must be prepared for that morning call in the south. For I suspect I shall *have* to go and rule over the Easterns after all. It is better than decay in a country like this. There is something grand, as you say, in being a satrap. I feel a call to it—and so," added Fermor, gliding into a tender cadence, "good-by, dear Miss Carlay. We have had some pleasant hours together; at least *I* have."

The girl said nothing. Fermor held her hand a moment, let it go suddenly, and then left the room. Without any "pronounced" sensation in this farewell, there was still a secret hint as of something dramatic and touching. Fermor's "exquisite steering" (his expression to himself) had given this tone to the situation. At the door he came full on Mr. Carlay.

"We are going away," said the latter, "as no doubt you have been told. I know very few, and scarcely one that I care for here; so it is not a great sacrifice for me. *She* would like to remain."

"Then why go?" said Fermor.

"This air of the south has been ordered for her. The winter is drawing on. And what is to become of you? I am told you are to go to India full of honours."

"Well, so they say," said Fermor, greatly gratified with this universal nomination of himself to office.

"Well, I am sure you will succeed. Write to us—to me. You have done great good in this house; you have really cheered *her* up. It was kind of you to come in and talk to her. A grim stiff fellow like me is no companion for a girl."

"Don't mention it, sir," said Fermor, in high good humour. "It was a pleasure to myself. It is rarely one finds so cultivated a mind."

"If," said the other—"if 't should ever come to pass—and we hear how short a way money goes in India—if—and I can assure you I don't want to offend; but I am a rude, rough fellow——"

"I understand," said Fermor, "perfectly. And to show that I take it as it is meant, I *do* promise to avail myself of your goodness. I do appreciate such kind thoughts, rely upon it. Perhaps one of these days I may look in upon you in France—who knows?"

This concluded his farewell with father and daughter. The

whole scene quite filled his mind. The Manuel family faded out and became small figures in the distance. At all events, there was nothing pressing.

The Eastport season was indeed drawing to a close. Sharp blasts were coming from the sea, charged with daggers and razors. The polite world was flitting away. Every day, at the newly-opened railway station, porters had busy work of it, labelling dark and heavy boxes for "London." And in first-floor windows was seen a crowd of appeals, growing daily more frequent, crying out piteously, "To Let," "To Let." Once the rush had set in, every one was eager to be gone; and the air was filled with declarations, "We are going on Monday," "We are going on Tuesday," &c., &c. The haste and hurry was almost indecent. It was as though some family with whom they had been intimate had been suddenly discovered to be unsuitable to know, and was to be "dropped" with all speed. Next year, when the season came on, the people would be bowing and greeting Eastport again with the pleasant effrontery of worldlings.

Thus, in a day or two, had Sir Hopkins Pocock, C.B., passed away, his despatch-box being put conspicuously under the seat by two porters. They thought it must contain watches or jewels. Thus, also, in a week or two, were Lady Laura Fermor and her daughters busy up-stairs putting up their camp-kettles and knapsacks, and once more getting ready for the road.

The Eastport sea-breezes, and the comparative inactivity of this campaign, had not been without profit for the veteran commander. If it had been otherwise, it would have made little difference, as however worn and footsore, she would have marched out of the place with the same spirit. Yet, though no serious operations had been undertaken, some successes of a substantial order had crowned their arms. It did, indeed, seem likely that what might be called a fort—Fort Piper—was about to fall. That stronghold, it will be remembered, was a sort of child, but of good expectations, and well worthy sitting down before and investing in all form.

The ripe charms of Alicia Mary had affected him. "Good God!" said Fermor, with strong disgust, as he met the child day after day in his mother's apartments. "You don't mean to say you are thinking of *that* infant! I declare it would be a sin—a crime! I could not stand by and look on. His friends ought to interfere. I am ashamed of you, Alicia."

For once the veteran sergeant lost command of her temper. This was tampering with the ranks. Her voice trembled. "None

of this," she said, walking up to him with a look he did not soon forget; "it is easy for *you* to make remarks. You must not interfere with the girls. No one asks *you* to give yourself trouble, nor, indeed, *have* you put yourself out in any way. We have had work enough of it, without help from any one, and I can't suffer any interference *now*. You understand; you have done for yourself in the way that suits you best, and no one has said a word to you. It is only fair that we should have *our* way. There!"

Fermor withdrew in some disorder. The Boy found a mysterious attraction in Alicia Mary, who was kind and encouraging after an almost maternal manner. He positively adored her. There were guardians in the way, it is true—providentially no Chancery, which had been fatal. And it was to sit down before these guardians that Lady Laura was now preparing to march. A ridiculous disparity, said the malicious. But how disparity, when he was next brother to Sir Thomas? How disparity, when the Sir Thomas alluded to had not, and ought not to have (on reliable guarantees), any children? Away with these puerile objections.

Alas for poor Violet while these weary shiftings were going on! She kept her mournful watches; only the inspiration of her maid sustained her. Fermor, in a day or so, came back to her. He diffused joy over the mansion; but he was moody, and "short,"—lowering symptoms, which Violet welcomed, after the first shock, with pleasure. For the elixir was working. Pauline did not come down to him; her presence, she thought, would only cloud the air more. Very soon his grievances came to the surface. He had observed, he said, that "your friend, Mr. Hanbury," had come back. This was more of the elixir. What did *that* mean, pray? Violet, a little flurried, called up her presence of mind. She did not know, she said. She supposed he had business, or some such reason. With a voice that trembled a little, she added, that he was "very good, *O*, so good," and that the people seemed to like him so.

"O, that is it," said Fermor, getting up, and walking over to the window; "I see!" Though a little terrified, Violet was pleased, for here were signs of the elixir. Fermor turned round smiling with grim scorn. "I see!" he repeated. He was thinking how this poor child was unconsciously showing "the little game" of the family.

The little faint lines in her face, and her secret suspense, struck him with a little pity. "That was all a mistake, you

know, the other night. I came back as fast as I really could, there was such a crowd; and when I got to the other end, you were gone."

This was a noble amende *for him*, the view that Violet in her heart of hearts had clung to all along. He was a hero again. Away went the little plot.

"Oh, how good of you," she said, in a tumult of foolish gratitude. "I knew that was the reason. I said so, all along."

"Ah! yes," said he; "I suppose there were plenty of persons to take the worse view."

Now was there an opportunity. She recovered herself.

"O, by the way," she said, with a sort of nervous coquetry, "I want you to do something for me. I have a plan, a great little scheme."

"A great little scheme?" said Fermor, smiling dryly at this description. "Well!"

"It is all my own plan entirely. I am going to give a little party."

Fermor started. "A party! Give a party! In the name of Providence, why should you do that?"

"Oh, it's all my own idea," said Violet. "I should so like it."

"Your own idea! It's simply absurd," said Fermor; "a party when everybody's out of the place; and in this little room——"

"But it's to be a *little* party," said Violet, coming up to him, and now filled with misgivings as to the policy of her proposal. "Only a few, I assure you."

"That of course you can arrange as you like," he said; "I only give my opinion. If you take *my* advice, you would not think of such a thing. It will only end in failure."

"O, if you please," said she, imploringly, "don't go against it. My heart is so set on this little scheme."

"Good gracious!" said he, "am I preventing it? Do just as you like. I only give my advice."

"But you will come? If you were to know how I have set my heart on it."

"On my coming?" said Fermor, smiling in spite of himself. "Well, I suppose the great little scheme must go on."

He was provoked afterwards that he had given way to this levity, or good humour. It took away from his sense of injury. But he left happiness behind. The maid, who was fairy god-

mother, found herself embraced, and overpowered with a burst of confidence, everything was going on so prosperously.

A week more, and more fashionable Israelites had gone out of the place. There were no traces, even of the spot where the Laura Fermor tents had been pitched a few days back. The fashionable London *Fremdenblatt* had announced them at their hotel, in Dover-street. Sir Hopkins, said the same register, was staying at Wycherley's, St. James's-square, genteel and costly chambers, well known to colonists. Every one was arriving somewhere in Town; and Eastport, abandoned and forsworn, began to have very much the look of the field where a gay circus has flourished temporarily, where the horses had galloped round, and the scarlet and tinsel fluttered, and the crowd shouted, but where now there was only the mark of a worn sawdust ring.

Fermor fumed against this abandonment. Things, as regards his personal affairs, had settled into a dead level. But he would have preferred something that he might work against. He went to see the Manuels fitfully, and bestowed gloom and mystery on them. The brother seldom appeared to him, and when he did, he seemed to be held, as it were, in a leash. But Violet, still anxious, and still fluttering, said to all their gentle remonstrances, "Leave it to me. Do, *do* now. We shall settle it all the night of the little party." This was indeed her plank.

The good woman in the wood, with a good deal of the pride which successful advice brings, had forecasted prodigious issues from this night. It was understood that it was to bring forth a new and perfect understanding, a resolution of all difficulties, even the naming of a near and certain day for the nuptials, and universal happiness and delight. "Leave it all to me! I know," said Violet, with a little air of mystery. And she had now come to brood anxiously over this eventful night, as though it were finally to determine her fate, as, indeed, it was destined to do.

Indeed, Fermor's strange mood would be hard to describe. He had an air of being "badly treated"—of being unsettled in his mind—of one that would neither go nor stay, yet he was "touchy," nervous, and would do nothing. He was waiting another event. Sir Hopkins had said he would write to him from London as soon as everything was settled, and "he saw his way finally." Someway Fermor had begun to have a restless feeling that this "seeing his way" would concern him

eventually. Yet the letter did not come. His family had not written either. "I suppose they think I may be treated any way and any how *now*," he said, bitterly. "I am a sort of cast-off, it would seem, to be dead and buried at once. They assume they have got rid of me now for good, and now that no profit may be made of me. Take care. I may disagreeably surprise them yet."

But there was yet another letter expected which did not come. Major Carter had said to him, "I have written, as you wished it, to old Foley at Dunkirk. He is the most wonderful 'gather-ups' of old stories in nature. Quartered in Spain, as I told you. He knows everything about everybody, and, depend upon it, we shall have a very full and curious letter. Now, my dear boy, don't say a word. I take this all on myself. I have no right to say anything of my own suspicions. I don't quite see my way as yet."

Thus it came to a certain Monday, for which evening Miss Manuel had asked a few friends to tea and music.

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-SIXTH.

FAUST AND MEPHISTOPHELES.

THAT weary day of the Manuel little party—and Violet had taken all its responsibilities on herself—seemed almost to trail by. Fermor was still fretting against what he thought the "unmeaningness" of the whole affair. Why, however, should they mind *him*? It was only to be expected that they would take their own course. No letters by post that morning. He had a good mind not to go at all, the thing was so absurd; but then if he got unwell and stayed away, he would be talked of, and wondered about, and looked at, which would be yet more absurd. Above all, there would be a scene—tears and injured looks, and *that* kind of pressure.

Hanbury had gone away for a few days, but had come back express the night before. His passage—some hundred and twenty pounds worth—had been taken and paid for out, but the splendid fast steamer had sailed out of Southampton a week ago. Groaning chests, ranked under the title of "heavy luggage," had been put on board a sailing ship, and the sailing ship had weighed anchor and dropped down the Thames, so

that was lost as well as the passage money. He "sold off" many things, furniture, dogs, horses—among others, the famous brute that had won the fatal race—hurriedly, and at a sacrifice. So here was further loss. Yet he did not care. He was beginning actually to live again, to breathe, to stretch his arms. He was seen to walk fast and excitedly, not to slouch along. His hopelessness was being mixed up with uncertainty—which was an improvement; just as a condemned prisoner is encouraged when he knows that powerful exertions are being made for a reprieve.

Major Carter, who had got letters that morning, met him in the little street. Hanbury was full of importance. The major turned back with him.

"A great day for Eastport," said the major, cheerily. "We are all so interested in our sweet friend's little adventure. *Quod faustum, &c.*, you know the quotation"—(which Hanbury did not). "They are charming girls—what I call a sweetness about them."

Hanbury turned on him eyes that almost swam. "Indeed they are," he said; and out of gratitude he could not but add: "and I know, I am sure, they like you."

"I dare say Miss Violet does," said the other "I don't think Miss Pauline quite so much. She, Miss Violet, is so soft and winning; like the flower she is called after, so retiring and delicate. Do you know, my dear Hanbury, I often get uneasy when I think of the rough east winds—you understand me?" Hanbury sighed heavily. "And that, I will confess to you," added the major, lightly touching the arm of his friend, "is the only thing that gives me a little uneasiness on her score—I mean, our friend Fermor, who, though he has a fine natural disposition, and is full of the best points, is scarcely suited—you understand. And now, do you know, it has occurred to me lately, that some such idea has lately come upon her gentle mind; and it has been remarked," added the major, with mystery, "by others, too."

Hanbury became irresolute. "Fermor," he said, "is indeed scarcely suited. I doubt if he understands her."

"He is really a fine character," said the major, warmly, "and is my friend. But I tell you, candidly, I never liked this match. He is for the world. She is for quiet domestic happiness. Poor sweet child! I can see she is even now turning back to old days. Another sort of nature would have suited her better. It is too late now to go back."

"Yes," said Hanbury, gloomily.

"But," said the major, "I am very glad of this opening, for I have wished to speak to you, and *you* are not a man to misunderstand frankness. It will not do—it will not answer."

"How!" said Hanbury, colouring.

"I say, I wish it could be undone, but it can't. No, it lies on you. You must discourage it as much as you can. She is young and impulsive, and cannot hide her feelings. But you must be generous, and make the sacrifice."

Clumsily disguised pleasure flashed in Hanbury's eyes. He could hardly contain himself. "You know," said he, confidentially, "I owe nothing to Fermor. He used me unfairly. It is an open game between us. Besides," he added, with pride, "if I could only save her——"

"Hush!" said the major, this is all in confidence. I merely threw out the hint. Fermor would be in a fury if he knew it. I must go. Think no more of it, I beg. We shall meet at the little festival. *Au revoir!*"

Hanbury went his way with all his spirits, soul, heart, everything bounding and springing within him. He hurried tumultuously to the Manuels. He found them in confusion. Violet and her confidential maid were out. She was almost, Hanbury found out, in a sort of light fever; for the crisis was now drawing on. Her sister had noted even a little wildness. She was wrought up to the highest pitch, for she had given out, as it were by proclamation, that this night was to end the whole—to bring everything to a splendid issue. By this charm, she had with difficulty laid that sleeping lion, her brother.

Hanbury, roaming about the little town, soon lighted on her. He came up to her shyly, yet exuberantly. She welcomed him according to her new tactics; led him about as her escort to many shops, and chattered all the while—all the while, too, looking eagerly round to the right and left for spectators. These she soon found. For Young Brett passed by, and looked after them, wondering; and Major Carter passed by, also wondering, before whom Hanbury drew himself up with pride. But Fermor, who was most desired, did not see that little progress.

He had paced his room a great deal that night. He was now feeling the monotony of desertion. He had no excitement to keep him up. "To be wasting in this place," he thought; "and a life like mine, by my own stupid folly, to be flung away." Rarely, indeed, in his life, had Fermor made so honest a confession of incapacity.

It was coming to four o'clock, and darkening gradually. Post came about five. He had bade his man, Mr. Bates, to be sure to go down before the time, and fetch his letters. "Of course there will be no letters," he said, "because I *want* them. I suppose they think, *now*, I am not worth writing to."

By-and-by dropped in Young Brett, who on the mention of Violet, or her "little party," told eagerly how he had just met her "with that fellow Hanbury." He remarked that that gentleman was plucking up wonderfully. He wondered what he (Hanbury) "was at, hanging about" in this way.

"I know," said Fermor, starting up and beginning to pace the room. "I understand it. It's no matter now, but it will all come right in time."

Some little friendliness on Young Brett's part being repelled rather roughly, that youth went away scared. "We shall meet to-night," he said, as a farewell.

"Well!" said the other, "I suppose we shall. We meet now, and may meet to-morrow. There is no need of telling each other such good news?"

"No! no! of course," said poor Brett, colouring.

Later came Major Carter.

"I met your friend Hanbury in great spirits."

"I suppose," said Fermor, "in Miss Violet's company. What is the meaning of this?" he added, violently. "Do they want to set me up for the whole town to laugh at? People coming in here every minute telling me what they see." All Fermor's injuries came rushing on him. "I'm not to be played on in this fashion. To be talked of by the low tea-table gossips of a low place like this. What, are they playing these petty tricks on me? I tell you what, if I chose, I could give them a lesson."

"No, no," said the major; "I acquit *her*—she is too much of a child, too quiet and harmless."

"Who mentioned her, pray?" said Fermor, becoming calm. "Did I? A child? She's *not* a child—because I know what I am doing. Too much of a child! *There's* a nice alliance for a man that might rise in the world. A man that at this moment might be high in India, and talked of. I declare, Carter, I could sit and cry when I think of all I have lost and been obliged to give up, and for such a set. You know what I am, and what is in me. Isn't it a cruel thing? And Sir Hopkins knows—yet I must say has behaved well, but what could he do? 'A child,' and 'perfectly harmless,' in India! And after all this, to be playing their wretched little games upon me."

This was a tremendous burst for Fermor.

"I must say," said the major, calmly, "their proceedings are quite beyond me. It is a game, I tell you candidly, and I have reason to know it."

"You have?" said Fermor, eagerly; "show it to me. Prove it."

The major shook his head. "I can only say," he said, "that I met that very Mr. Hanbury, and had a little talk with him."

"He was in spirits," said Fermor.

"How did you know that?" said the major, astonished. "So he was. He threw out some hints. You know he is rather of an open nature. By the way, he seemed to hint at a sort of justification of himself, as he said you had used him very ill."

"I suppose so," said Fermor. "What is he aggrieved about? Good gracious! Who forces *her*, or who is forcing? If they want him, let them take him, in God's name. Let her say so at once, and let them have done with these wretched tricks. I'm sick of them."

This was the irritation of, say, a month back, all burst forth at one moment. The major paused. "I am glad you have spoken to me so frankly," said he. "I should advise some decided course. A clear, final, and positive explanation. They seem to rest a good deal on to-night. I shall come here again, later, if you will allow me."

The major was gone, the darkness was coming on yet stronger. It was past five o'clock, and here now was his man, Bates, entering with the lamp, and the post. Absolutely a whole mail of letters for Captain Fermor. "And here, sir," added Bates, "is a letter as was just left by Miss Manuel's maid." The demeanour of Miss Manuel's maid, had she to make such an announcement with a reference to Mr. Bates, would have been conscious and awkward. But Mr. Bates was a soldier and unmoved. One from Lady Laura. One from his agent. Several from tailors, perfumers, besides circulars, and a large envelope directed in Sir Hopkins's well-known official hand. Nervously, though he expected nothing from it, Fermor drew his chair in and began to read. It was very closely written, and with a heart which beat quicker and quicker with every line, he read it through. Towards the end, he rose and took a short hurried march backward and forward, then read on; when he had finished, there was a strange look in his eyes.

He rang the bell. "Go for Major Carter at once," he said to Mr. Bates; "do not lose a moment."

He did not open Lady Laura's epistle, though it contained news that young Piper had, the night before, offered himself to Alice Mary, at the hotel; nor the mixed crowd of tailors' and other tradesmen's. He read his relative's letter over again.

The major came. He had had a letter, too, from the same writer, but he did not mention it. Another time he would have been all amazement, delight, and surprise. Now he took the letter gravely which Fermor put into his hand.

"Read it out," said Fermor.

He dropped into a chair, and the major, leaning his face over the lamp, read out the letter:—

"Sunday Evening.

"MY DEAR CHARLES,—I am starting surrounded by boxes and packages, but must find a moment to write to you on a very important matter.

"I told you I did not see my way. I should have been obliged to go without seeing it. I have just heard of the death of old Colin Mackenzie, who has been treasurer of government for the last forty years. The place is in my gift, and must be worth at the very least a thousand a year. *As my first bit of patronage, I offer it to you.*

"You must think of this seriously, and decide *at once*. The little office I spoke of before was not, I admit, sufficient to tempt a man of parts to change his life, but this is a different question. The position is very delicate, considering the way you are situated. You will do me the justice to say that I never, by persuasion or advice, have attempted to interfere with your plans of life; but, on this occasion, I must speak plainly. This is really a great opening; it may lead to all sorts of things; and, if I were in your place, I would not hesitate a second; but it is for you to decide.

"As for that family for whom you seem to have a sort of infatuation, you know my opinion. If I had time, I could tell you some little matters I have picked up here. As for the child herself, I would pity her, if I did not think *she was a little too clever*. My dear boy, these things occur every day. Young St. Rousser—Lord Nimmo's eldest—behaved badly, as it is called, to Vansittart's daughter, and there were tears and broken hearts; but in six months she had accepted old Bob Major of the Blues. She had been *protecting* herself all the while. You see how these things are done. But I think I have a right to make terms. I have other things in view for you. *Prizes, my boy.* I do for you; you should do for me.

"Or again, why be in a hurry? If you cannot live without this soft innocent, why not put it off a year or so, until you look about you? The thing is common enough. She can do, I suppose, as other young ladies have done before, and her people have no right to be taking extra airs on themselves. My dear Charles, you are a man of sense, and I have no right to tell you to do this, or do that; but you *must decide at once*, as the post is for some one else, and the appointment must be made before I go out. I shall wait one day—twelve hours—at Paris, for your answer by telegraph. Direct to the Hôtel Mirabeau.

"Yours truly,

"HOPKINS POCOCK.

"P.S.—The packet leaves Marseilles on Friday at noon. If you accept, you would have almost time to sail with me. Tuesday, London (arrange with War-office—sell your commission. You will find a note at my rooms for Sir Charles, one of my oldest friends); Wednesday, Paris; Thursday, Marseilles. You will find me at the Empereur. I have just met old Lord Welbeck on the stairs."

Major Carter lifted his face from the lamp. There was a pause for a moment; then he said, "A kind, sensible letter. A judicious letter."

"But," said Fermor, in a flutter, "assuming all that, what am I to do?"

"I should say you had no choice. It is all decided for you here," said the major, tapping the letter. "You have no right to hesitate. Good gracious, Fermor!" he continued, suddenly becoming warm, "what are you about? Are you going to let this chivalrous sort of indulgence for a set of people—forgive me—who *have treated you infamously—yes, infamously—*wreck your whole life? I can't stand by and see it; I cannot. Your friends must interfere, even at the risk of offending you."

"Yes, yes," said Fermor, hastily, "you are right. They have no title to expect anything from me."

"Good heavens, what a prospect!" said the major, reflectively. "What I always prophesied."

"Yes," said Fermor, absently, "they deserve nothing from me—nothing. The only thing is that poor, poor girl."

"Poor girl!" said Carter, with a meaning look that conveyed volumes; "but no matter. How good that of Sir Hopkins about 'protecting themselves!' Besides, how does he put it?"

Could anything be more delicate, considerate? Is there any hurry?"

"To be sure. No—certainly," said Fermor, hastily.

"I tell you what," said Carter, slowly, "it strikes me you should go without delay. This very night. The express passes through at midnight."

Fermor started a little guiltily. Perhaps some such notion had been in his thoughts.

"Yes," said the other, quickly, "the best, the kindest, the most charitable course. I know what your own generous instinct would suggest. But it is time that your friends, if they have any influence, should interfere, and act for you."

"But that poor Violet," said Fermor, moving about restlessly.

"It is of *her* we are thinking, are we not?" said the major. "Is it not best to spare her the agitation, the fuss, and all the rest of it? It is the best opportunity you could have. It is like a providence. They have their little party (a woman's mind is easily filled), and their music, and their gaieties—our friend—er—Mr. Hanbury."

"Ah, truly!" said Fermor; "quite right. I did not think of that. I really begin to think it would be all for the best."

"Now that is sensible, and manly, and, I must say, most considerate. If you would care for it, we could go together. I have business that will take me to Town later, so it is only anticipating."

"O, thanks, thanks," said Fermor; "I should so like it." He had been rather shrinking from the gloomy journey by himself.

"Is it settled then? Yes? Very well, I shall be back in an hour," said Major Carter.

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-SEVENTH.

VIOLET'S PARTY.

FERMOR, left to himself, was in a whirl of excitement. His heart actually beat as he thought of the daring move he was about to make. Still he shrank from it; it seemed *ungentlemanly*. Above all, he thought of Violet's anxious face, appealing piteously. The crust of the fashionable world had

not yet so wholly covered up his heart. For a moment he thought there was "no hurry," and that the most generous course was the best. But as soon as he had taken this view, he began—what is not uncommon with uncertain minds—to see the merits of the opposite course. It was quixotic; they were provident adventurers looking after their interests, and, above all, there was that soft Violet skilfully furnishing herself with a useful reserve in case of his failure. And thus he swung round indignantly to the other view. Then, through the clouds, broke out the soft, appealing face of Violet, and her "little ways;" but before he had done with that vision the major returned. He found Fermor sitting in the chair by the lamp, just as he had left him. The major had on his travelling-cap and cloak.

"All packed?" he said. "Not much time—half-past eight."

"I don't know *what* to do," said Fermor, a little excitedly. "It does seem so heartless, does it not? Poor, poor girl! When they tell her in the morning!"

"That feeling is most creditable," said the major, calmly. "I quite sympathise with it. But I recollect what Sir Hopkins says, and what occurred to me too. *You only put off—don't break off.* My dear Captain Fermor, take my word for it, they are well used to this sort of thing—that clever sister and that unlicked brother."

"By the way," said Fermor, starting, "there was a letter came from him; what became of it?"

He looked for it, and opened it. The major saw Fermor's brow contracting as he read; but did not know, though he might guess, that it was to the old tune, of which that brother was so fond. It hoped imperiously that Fermor would consider the matter seriously, and now make up his mind; that these delays were not respectful to his sister, and to them all; that her health was suffering; and that, once for all, he *required* a definite settlement of the question that night. The whole key was imperious, and, to Fermor's mind, insolent. It was, alas! fatally *mal à propos*.

He tossed down the missive, and said, "That settles it! My mind is made up. I shall go at once."

At the very moment that Fermor was flinging down the letter, Violet was in her room dressing for the little festival. Her sister and the faithful maid were assisting. The faithful maid was on her knees, busy with the skirt. Both these assistants seemed to know that much depended on the work of this night. The maid

having, indeed, foretold certain success, was calm and confident. Violet was before the glass, flushed and excited. She had not a particle of vanity, but she dressed herself to-night as though she had been another being—say a sister. She was nervously vivacious, and talked with a little rambling. She came down at last, and, as she entered their little drawing-room, felt herself all panting; for she knew she was now embarked fairly in the scheme she had undertaken, and that the time was at hand.

"You look charming," her sister said, going up to her; "so bright and sparkling, and in such spirits!" The sister had said the same to the maid, and the maid had agreed with the sister.

"Do you think he will like me?" said Violet, in a little rapture. "Oh, you shall see to-night how he will behave—that is, if I *have* any power with him." And her face fell a little wearily, for her head was confused, and her brain overcharged with little speeches and little tactics, which she had been planning all day.

"He cannot resist you, dearest," said her sister, kissing her almost passionately. "He never can."

The little rooms had been laid out artistically with flowers and modest decorations. There was a foreign air and a foreign touch over all. There were only a few people to come after all. The fact was, as Fermor had put it, they knew but few, and nearly all those few had left Eastport. After many weary searches and beating up of districts, the entertainment was to resolve itself into such homely elements as the representative clergyman, the representative doctor, the representative solicitor, the representative stray young man and old maiden ladies of the place—shrubs never transplanted, and to whom a little feast of this sort was as water in sultry weather. It was now ten o'clock, and they, with Mr. Hanbury, came with provincial punctuality.

She was very nervous, and thought how she would begin, or what was the first of those painfully-planned operations. Her little head was miserably confused. But she had not time to think. For here was the representative clergyman, with boundless wife and daughters; and after him the doctor; and, following, the choir of maiden ladies and debateable youths—scarcely boys, nor yet wholly men. Yet these latter were negotiable, and the two or three girls who leavened the community welcomed them cheerfully.

Major Carter and Captain Fermor would, as of course, come flashing in late. Welcome they at any time. For such brilliant

a dull background and setting was necessary. Yet already had a white-faced pendule (a gilt classical lady, sitting on a metallic sofa, with the dial between the legs of the sofa) given a smart "ting." Young Brett, faithful as a terrier, had come, and was keeping close to Miss Manuel, with his faithful terrier eyes fixed on her face. Another officer or two, reluctantly asked by Fermor, gave "an air" to the party, as a master would give a touch to a drawing.

She was at the piano, out of the room, in the room, and everywhere. When the dial between the sofa legs of the pendule gave out eleven "tings," Violet's face began to show some of the old lines of anxiety. As little processions entered the room, of ices, teas, and cakes, she started and looked towards the door. The opening of her little campaign was being too, too long delayed. Her heart was growing sick, and she heard a military European say aloud, with the freedom of his tribe, "I say, what the deuce can have become of Fermor?"

Below stairs others had been wondering also, but for this reason: that Mr. Bates, who had readily promised his services with trays and other heavy objects, had appointed to be there at ten "sharp," as he put it. Ten "sharp" had long gone by; it was now a good deal more than eleven sharp. Much troubled in mind by this desertion, and really laying it to the account of death or accident, the faithful maid, Jane, "slipped on" her bonnet and shawl, and flitted away up to Brown's Terrace. When the door was opened she asked for Captain Fermor. He had gone out—taken his things, too—so had Mr. Bates. But a note had been left, which was to be sent up in the morning to Mrs. Manuel's. Here it was.

Wondering, much mystified, and not at all "seeing her way," for so clever a fairy godmother, she went home. She could not get further than that Mr. Bates and Captain Fermor had gone to their barracks for the better facilities of dressing. It was not improbable.

By the time she reached home it was long past twelve o'clock. The brother, Louis, had been biting his lips; his heart was full of fury at this public slight, as it appeared to be. Certain of the elderly maidens had said to Pauline in a friendly endearing way, "How is it that Captain Fermor is not here, my dear?" Violet, in such distress with this protraction that she had flung away all thought of acting, sat with her eyes fixed, worn, and hopeless, on the door, her figure drooped, her fine clothes hanging about her, and Hanbury watching her with a sad and puzzled interest.

As the pendule "ting'd" half-past twelve, she started as if it were the bell for execution. Another bell rang at the hall, and she went hurriedly over to the window. It was the maid, and Violet saw the note in her hand. In great trepidation she all but ran out of the room.

Ah! at that moment the London express had halted for refreshment forty miles away. Fermor and his friend Carter, wrapped in cloaks, were standing on the platform—forty miles away—under an illuminated clock.

The maid tripped up-stairs, bonnet and shawl on. Violet met her at the door.

"Give—give it to me," she said, wildly.

"All quite right, miss," said the maid, confidentially; "*they will be here presently.*"

The door was wide open, and nearly every one of the little company—the Europeans, natives, all—heard a slow, sad, agonising cry outside, and Young Brett ran out just in time to catch her in his arms. Many crowded out and saw the hapless child, with what seemed death in her face, and one arm outstretched, holding tightly the fatal sheet of paper.

In a moment they had all poured out on the little landing, with a curiosity which overbore all decent restraint. The girls crushed and rustled to see. "What is it? what was it? what is in the letter? has he broken it off? gone off, has he?" One, indeed, had artfully glanced at the open paper in that now rigid little hand. The story was, indeed, known, or as good as known, in a few seconds.

There lay the poor child in her flowers and tulle, ghastly white, relaxed, and as it seemed dying, supported by Hanbury, who, bursting through the little crowd, had taken her from Young Brett. In a few moments more they carried her up, her little finery all torn into shreds, as it was trod on by those who carried her, amidst the despairing faces of her own family. The crowd, transformed into a "low" crowd by the greed of curiosity, crept half-way up the stairs, and listened. But Hanbury, coming down, bluntly and roughly and without ceremony, cleared them out of the house. Only the representative doctor—who had come as a guest—remained professionally.

However terrible such a crisis, shattering the brain even as a blow of a bludgeon does the skull, it seldom kills. Far later on that night, or on that morning, she opened her eyes on the anxious faces gathered round her, shivered, shrieked again, subsided soon into low sighs and quiet moans. The representative

doctor then stepped in, and brought such remedies as he could apply.

At that moment the express, a hundred and twenty miles away, was rolling into London. It was a cold morning. The colder grey was breaking. For the last hour, under the pleasant encouragement of the major, Fermor had ceased to look back, and was beginning to look forward to a gay and brilliant future. The little fibres, whose parting had caused him a little pain, were joining again very fast. They had even had some snatches of sleep.

"They must have had a merry night of it," said the major, as they went to claim their luggage; "much more so than we poor travellers—eh? I can tell you they have enjoyed it! Goodness! how sleepy I am! And our friend Hanbury, I bet you, has been making good use of his time—eh?"

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-EIGHTH.

A MEETING.

ALL that long day Fermor had hardly time to think. At the Horse Guards—at the Indian outfitter's—at his tailor's—at his family's, he lived almost in cabs. He saw that Sir Charles who was "one of his relative's oldest friends," and was received with unofficial cordiality. "Glad to do anything for my old chum, Sir Hopkins. Besides, you have had no leave for eighteen months. Severe accident, too. Very well. Leave directions with your agents, and we shall take care of you."

Later he saw his mother, Lady Laura.

The "girls" were in the Park with "Young Piper," riding the coursers of Young Piper. That youth was, as it were, drunk with his infatuation. Lady Laura welcomed her son as though she were an ordinary mother of flesh and blood, gave him a really maternal embrace, and approached nearer to weeping than she had ever done in her life.

"My dear boy," she said, as he told her his story, "I am indeed proud of you. This is a brave, manly, and sensible course. I always said I admire your resolution and self-denial. I do indeed. Look at that child Piper, that's running after Alicia Mary, like a weak schoolboy. But I said all along that you were following out some little plan of your own; and I was not

far out." Fermor was a little elated with these praises, and had a sort of dim impression that "all along" his hand directed the course of events. "As for the girl—who, I am told, is clever enough—would you, my dear Charles, leave it to me? Shall I write a kind, friendly note, to say the thing must stand over for the present, and that if you are both in the same mind when you return, why, it can all begin again? That is the proper way, Charles, and a very good test it will be of her sincerity. Young Monboddoo went to his regiment at Ceylon under exactly such an arrangement with that country girl; but, my dear, when he came back, he found her my Lady Nugent."

The excitement prevented him from thinking. By the evening he had done a wonderful day's business. He met Major Carter by appointment at Starridge's, the correct bachelor's hotel in Bond-street, and they dined together. At eight they were driving up to the South-Eastern railway, among the flashing lamps, to go down by the mail to Dover.

"I met," said the major, as they got out, "some common friends to-day. I did not tell you, as it was to be a little surprise for you."

Fermor was glad. He was growing gloomy and morose as he thought of this second night's journey to be taken alone. The major was to stay in London.

"Here they are," said he, as they emerged on the busy platform; and Fermor saw a tall stiff figure in shadow, and a muffled lady on his arm. "I declare, here are our friends," said the major. "Defightful, is it not? Going the same way, too—quite a coincidence."

Perhaps it was. The Carlays were going to the south of France after some days' stay in London. Now, indeed, the gloomy prison-like journey, which he had shrunk from, would become a little blue boudoir, well lit, comfortable, and cheerful. This simple girl would entertain him with her unconcealed worship. The act of making a journey together is a link of sympathy, for there are common troubles and a common undertaking.

So the bell rang, and the night mail flew down to Dover, past many sleepy pointsmen, who had come out of their hutches on duty, and saw the cozy, well-lighted blue chambers flit by; in one of which Captain Fermor, his knees wrapped in his rug, was stooping over, talking with great animation of voice and gesture to the lady next him. Then came the cold night air on the pier, and the rocking packet, and weary dozing, and Paris in the grey

of the morning, and the great Boulevards, with the trees and the white palaces, and the men in blouses going to work, and the great door of the great hotel, which a portier, who never slept, swung slowly open. Then the sleepy travellers went to their rest—for an hour or so.

Fermor had often boasted of his "iron constitution," and by ten or eleven o'clock was asking to see "his Excellency" Sir Hopkins Pocock, who was breakfasting in a private room of the hotel.

The welcome he received from that high public servant was indeed cordial. "My dear, dear boy," he said, "this is right, now. I am proud of you. You were made for the service. I knew you would turn out the right sort. This is our hard fate. We are obliged to pocket our nicest feelings for the public. Breakfasted? No? Then ring, please."

They breakfasted together, spent the day very pleasantly going about, Sir Hopkins leaning on his arm; dined at the Three Brothers café; went to the opera, and walked after the opera along that Arabian Nights' Entertainment, which is the Boulevard des Italiens. Fermor felt pensive among these glories, yet was not disturbed in mind—great dreams of ambition were filling his soul.

In the morning they were gone again, flying down through the delightful wine countries to Lyons, seeming to breathe the bouquet of Burgundies and other choice vintages as they passed. Musical names rang in their ears. They were at Lyons that night; and there was light enough, as they crossed the airy bridge, to see the molten silver of the Rhône below. They slept soundly through the night, and in the morning were breakfasting at "The Empereur," at Marseilles. The hum and clatter of the Canebière was under their windows. The gay parti-coloured sails before the shop-windows were fluttering below them. The delightful quay of La Joliette was but a few yards away, where the ships of all countries, and the sailors of all countries, and the merchants and the wares, and the voices and the dresses of all, were as gay and bright under the sun as the market scene in Masaniello. The steamer was to sail at noon—as, indeed, were many more steamers, and the commissioner was busy in their interest.

"By the way, my dear boy," said Sir Hopkins, picking his teeth, "(I have sent for the cab), I found a letter here this morning. Sent on, you know. It is rather awkward. That post I spoke of—Mackenzie's—you know."

"Yes," said Fermor, nervously. "Good gracious! nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, it will all come right, I am sure. But, it now seems (I don't understand it, I am sure), the home government claims the appointment."

"WHAT?" said Fermor, breaking out hotly. "Do you mean to tell me that, after all I have done, and been *made* to do——"

"It is outrageous, as you say," said Sir Hopkins, coolly; "they grasp at everything. The worst part is, they have a sort of a shadow of a title, you see—some arrangement or composition. But, of course, it must be looked into."

"But," said Fermor, pacing up and down excitedly, "this is very odd—*looks* very odd! I don't understand it. I have been led away depending on assurances, and now it seems—I must tell you, sir—it has a very curious look, sir."

"I am not accountable, Charles. You must deal with the home government. It is they who are grasping at the office. You know there is time yet to withdraw."

"Ah! it is easy, sir, to say there is time to withdraw. At this place—at this time—after sacrificing everything on the faith of this—my word—my honour——"

"Your honour! Good God!" said Sir Hopkins, starting up, and nearly overthrowing his chair. "Your honour, Charles! I *hope* not. O, I hope not. You are not in earnest? No, I see you are not."

Fermor hung his head. There was a pause.

"I don't mean that," he said. "But, sir, sir," he added, sadly, "you cannot deceive me in this way."

"Come, come," said Sir Hopkins, in a friendly, hearty manner, "I allow for this excitement, Charles. It is quite natural, and I respect you for it. There are other things going, and we shall make out something for you. You know," added Sir Hopkins, smiling, "it would hardly do to *re-present* yourself after all this fuss and esclandre. As the Frenchmen say, ridicule always kills. I declare," he added, looking down over the balcony, 'here is the cab. We really ought to pay the bill now. Yes, 'nd put the final touches to the baggage. Will you look after those servants, like a good boy? Allons."

Fermor bowed his head and said not a word. In a few minutes more he was driven away to the quay, and was on board the Indian mail-boat.

The life on board the Mediterranean steamer was epicurean. There were bright days and cobalt seas. Youth was at the prow, and Pleasure at the helm. It was a gay voyage.

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-NINTH.

FADING OUT.

AT the very time that Captain Fermor (who must fill up his day), seated on a camp-stool on deck, was gossiping agreeably to an Indian lady whose husband was below at cards, a dreary desolation and hopeless sorrow was falling on the Manuels' house.

Violet rose up after the shock sooner than her family dared to hope. For a week the very acuteness of the suffering, the excitement and speculation it brought with it, carried her forward. Her sister, worn away with night watching, had whispered desperately, "You must not give way, darling; keep away the thought; fight it off;" for she knew, if it once seized on her, the talons would sink deeper and deeper, and never let her go. She said this over and over again, with a sort of despair—almost with menace; and Violet, already stunned and exhausted, actually found herself avoiding the thought by a sort of horror.

It was when she came down again into the whole routine of life—white, worn, shrunk, and with a timid, cowering look, as if she expected that the blow would come again from some uncertain quarter—that the change was seen in all its dismal force. They could all have wept over her. And when sister and mother clung about her, and pressed her to them, they remarked a sort of insensibility that did not require consolation.

"I am getting better," she said, looking at them with a little air of resolution. "I am indeed. I shall gradually learn not to think of it, and then it will wear itself out."

Wear itself out! Alas! There was something busy at *that* work already: thoughts in myriads, seething and bubbling night and day—thoughts of fearful self-reproach, as if this business had been the work of her own folly—thoughts of lost happiness, sheer hopelessness, and a cloud of despair in the west, coming on slowly, though now no bigger than a man's hand. With such fierce contests the little delicate frame was wearing, though

slowly. The sheath was fretting away. And, besides, there was a struggle of concealment—which was, indeed, the only *purpose* that kept her up—not to hurt those kind, miserable, interested faces that were turned to her a hundred times in the day.

The suffering was, indeed, almost divided. On Mrs. Manuel and the others the blow had fallen so tremendously, the crash had been so bewildering, so wholesale and complete, that they did not even dream of looking back, or think of a remedy. They might as well have been looking, after an avalanche, to where their house once stood. It could hardly be called hopelessness, for they had never dreamed for a moment of hoping. The whole thing was too plain. And now all they thought of was saving what was left to them.

What coldness and almost rawness was in the house! As though there was a dusty lonely hearth in every room, and the fires were never to be lighted again. The terrible gauntness of life, that sets in after the death of any one that has been loved, seemed to be present. Yet Violet, with a cheerfulness that made the hearts of all about her ache, went hither and thither with what seemed a newly-found zest for the practical duties of life. No one, as yet, could see how it would end.

As the Eastport season was now over, and the town itself almost emptied, this little catastrophe came in seasonably enough for the natives. The good folks were grateful, and the “witnesses” to the scene—unhappily too few in proportion to the want of the population—were held even in a competitive esteem. Even in communities of greater importance such a business rarely takes place. It was canvassed in many shapes, with eagerness, humour, anger; but in most instances with satisfaction.

Young Brett—as indeed might be expected—now shone out in brightest and most faithful colours. More honest and serviceable devotion could not be conceived. He took it grievously to heart, yet with divided emotions; for he could not bring himself to believe *much* ill of his friend, whom he clung to so loyally. He charitably held to their being foreign influences at work, and to Fermor’s being in some sort the victim of destiny. Having arrived, through many painful stages of reasoning, at this conclusion, he was at liberty to indulge his sympathy. How his heart was wrung for that suffering family! How, with a deeply dejected face, he came there when he thought he could, and as often as he could, with decency! And when admitted he

could have wished himself away, he found himself so dull and clumsy. He would have given worlds to have been allowed to show his deep, deep feelings in some bold, substantial shape; for what were words—which, after all, he did not possess, and could not buy? He thought faintly and remotely of the gun, so satisfactory in the instance of men. He had always found it the fullest and happiest exponent. Here he saw it was wholly out of place, but the idea in his mind was as of something *analogous* to the gun. This lay on his mind, and the honest child laboured much, and with real distress, at what he called seeing his way, and saw, at least, that he must bound his wishes by mere sympathy.

For Pauline he felt most, and was so earnest that she should employ him in some way, that she felt for him, and did give him some trifling commission. He would have been proud to have been used as errand-boy even. His good terrier face, full of sympathy, brought a sort of comfort to the house.

Someway he seemed more suited to the present tone of affairs than John Hanbury, who came also, and tried hard to make himself useful and acceptable. Yet he felt—and felt very unjustly, too—that he was associated with the late business. His honest face, full of unbounded sympathy, kept alive what all were anxious to put away, like the vacant chair of a lost relative, or a picture. He could not bring himself to see it in this way, and was, in fact, longing and praying for some opening in which he could prove himself devoted.

Those weeks were indeed an awful time. The weary look in Violet's face almost shocked him. About the twentieth evening of the twentieth day Hanbury found her alone in the drawing-room, and with the best intentions in the world began to offer some earnest good advice, but which he handled clumsily.

It was to the strain of "going away," of "keeping up," of "having a duty to oneself, and the friends who loved her so," with the other platitudes, about as useful and practical as though one were to say in the case of a broken blood-vessel, "Do make an effort, and the bleeding will stop." He spoke with a trembling voice. "For God's sake do, dearest Miss Violet. It is killing us all to see the way you look. For all our sakes, *do*, I implore you; and there are some of us who would die for you."

Violet listened a little vacantly at first, passed her hand over her face, tossed her head, and laughed a faint laugh. "Why

do you talk of dying?" she said; "pray don't mention the word. We have all wonderful dispositions. I will get mamma to go somewhere. I should like a pleasant watering-place, with plenty of people; something gay, for this is growing dull. So dull," added Violet, forcing the muscles of her lips into a smile, "that—that——"

Hanbury was looking at her, wondering and terrified, when she spoke out suddenly, covering up her face,—

"I can't, I *can't* any longer; I can't indeed! Go away, leave me—do—let every one leave me. O!" and she was tossing on the sofa, gasping and sobbing in a sort of frantic tempest of grief. Hanbury rushed to the bell, rushed to the door. They were all in the room in a moment, round the unhappy child. Hanbury fled to the open street, beating his forehead as he went. More of the old clumsiness! He could go and drown himself.

Posting along, and not caring where he went, he suddenly saw Colonel Bolstock, Fermor's colonel, riding by; rather, he saw a horse of his own which the colonel had bought. The colonel pulled up; for a little talk about a horse, in the presence of a horse, was like having a cigar. An idea suddenly flashed upon Hanbury; not often had he such inspirations.

"Doing well," said the colonel, looking down the flanks of the horse; "turning out very fairly indeed."

"Tell me," said Hanbury, hastily; "Fermor's gone, I know, but what time did he say he would be back?"

"I gave him ten days' leave," said the colonel; "by the way, there's a horse of his——"

"There, that will do," said Hanbury, turning back; "I beg your pardon, I must go——" And he *was* gone, leaving the colonel looking sourly after him. Here was news indeed; stupid of them all not to have thought of that. After all, Fermor was true—called suddenly away. Above all, that *he* should be the bearer of some news! This would redeem months of clumsiness.

He rushed up-stairs and plunged into the room again. Violet was still working in hysterical sobbing. The anxious faces were about her.

"I have got some news," said Hanbury, his great eyes twinkling with honest delight. They all started. "Yes, *some* news," he said, "at least. He's only gone for ten days."

Violet flew to her mother with a cry. "I knew it! I knew it! I *knew* it!" she almost shrieked. "O, mamma! mamma!"

and she fell on her mother's shoulder, weeping and sobbing, and laughing again.

Pauline looked at Hanbury doubtfully, almost angrily. "What is this story?" she said, in a half whisper; "you should not have done it. Tell me about it."

"No, no," said he, scarcely listening, but looking anxiously at Violet; "it is all certain—the colonel himself told me. And I tell you what," he added, with excitement, "this night I am going up to London, will find him out there, tell him of our poor darling child, and return with joyful news. Perhaps bring him back! There!"

Pauline shook her head sorrowfully.

He saw opposition, and said, piteously, "*Let me go. Do I must, indeed. It will be doing something.*"

It did strike Pauline that it would, after all, be doing something. Anything—and the bare expectancy of anything—was better than the fatal waste of hopeless despondency into which they were now plunged.

She said no more, and Hanbury went his way. Alas! if he had only waited to hear that mounted colonel finish his sentence leisurely, he would have been told of a letter which had arrived at the barracks the day before. He had *not* waited.

Hanbury came back when he was ready. Violet was in a nervous flutter, saying over and over again, with a frantic delight, "I knew it! I knew it! What did I tell you all?"

"Don't reckon too much, darling, on these things. How it goes to my heart to damp your spirits—but don't."

"Nor do I reckon on too much, mamma. But now I have a conviction, a certain conviction. I knew it—I said it." (Poor child, she never *had* said it, indeed.) "Dear Mr. Hanbury, my own true friend, *you* know me, *you* understand me. I always believed it. Go, now. Don't lose a second. You will be too late, *indeed* you will. He will come back with you if he can; if not, make him write. Be sure you do."

Violet's face was earnest and wild, as she impressed these instructions on him.

"I must go up now," she said, the tired look spreading like a film upon her face, "for I have gone through a good deal lately, thinking over all this. And I have been very foolish; but you *must* own that his going away so suddenly on that night—it looked——"

Her eyes began to swim, and in a moment she was weeping silently and bitterly, but without her old agitation. And her

mother had put her arms round her, and said, straining her close, as if some one were about to take her away from her,—

“My own dear, darling, darling child!”

And thus Hanbury started after this fatal Will-o'-the-wisp. He got to London, and there was told the truth. “He's gone to India, sir,” said the gentleman at Starridge's. “Yes, he was on his way.”

Fermor at that moment was seeing the sun rise on the blue waters of the Mediterranean with fine effect. The packet was listlessly gliding over the sea. It was charming *dolce far niente*. The little romance he had passed through came back on him with a gentle pain, not wholly unpleasant. “Poor, poor Violet!” he said, “I feel some reproaches of conscience. I do indeed. She was so gentle. Only for that set about her—they were turning her into a perfect little Machiavel. Ah! Mrs. Rose, you out so early on deck? Is not this a picture! Is not this like molten cobalt, &c.!”

CHAPTER THE FORTIETH.

SICUT FLOS.

ON the day that Hanbury returned to Eastport by the mail train, there came with him, in the railway post-office, a letter in Lady Laura's writing—a letter which she had put off writing, partly from its being a disagreeable duty, and partly from her having other more important affairs to claim her attention. Her hearing of Hanbury's inquiries brought the matter again to her mind. “That girl” had been sending one of “her set” to look after Charles, perhaps to intimidate, so she went to her desk and wrote a good practical letter, a little kind in parts, a little cold in others, but, above all, lady-like. “After all,” said Lady Laura, “the girl has some reason to complain. Charles had no business to make a fool of her. With people of her class time is money. I must say,” thought Lady Laura, beginning to ruminate, “we got him out of it very cleverly. If I had been one of the stupid, storming, crying mother, he would have been tied to that girl by this time.”

She enclosed a letter of “Charles's” directed to Violet, which

had been lying in her desk for many days, and sent both to the post.

Hanbury could not bring himself to go near the place for hours after his arrival. A day had been fixed for his return, so he was expected. Violet was flitting about the house anxiously and restlessly, in a wearing agitation. She was, in fact, in a sort of low fever at the moment. Her pale face was seen at many windows looking out wistfully. A mysterious instinct of some terror or horror approaching filled all other hearts in the house.

The post came. With a little swoop Violet was down at the door. With her hot hand she got a letter addressed to herself, and knew Lady Laura's writing. She gasped as she tore it open. The others were on the stairs hurrying after her—but too late. There was Fermor's letter inside, and, with a cry of joy, she flew up-stairs. "He has written! He has written!" she said, "and I knew it! I knew it!"

What followed may be conceived—when the first lines of that letter, written ever so tenderly and gently, trembled before her eyes. She had instinct enough to guess it all. That was her last blow. How was it to be expected that so frail a creature should endure so much? The little resolution—the little "manfulness," if it may be called so, which she had kept up for the sake of others, had now given way, and the waters now rushed in.

On that night all was changed into a house of misery. A wretched mother of a wretched daughter, aged and feeble herself, could not endure all these shocks. The low fever present in Violet's hot hands spread violently. The local doctor, the same who had been at their little feast, came in again and began his work. He did what he could, yet he was not of "the skilful." Yet one of greater skill even than Mr. Cade, whose touch had so miraculously healed the bruised Fermor—(O sweet days! basking in a golden light, and removed centuries away!)—even *he* could not avail much more. A quiet patient; giving "no trouble," waiting for the moment eagerly.

Two miserable faces, worn and haggard, watched that slow travelling away: that soft face gradually spiritualised into a shadow. She was as quiet as a child—which indeed she was; so quiet, so calm, that they began to whisper doubtfully to themselves that she was growing better.

One Sunday morning the unskilful local doctor ran in to see her as he went to his church. The sun came in so brightly, the new flowers which thoughtful hands sent every day to fill the room looked so fresh and gay, and there was such a reflected brightness on Violet's face, and she spoke so softly and calmly, though still with her old weariness, that he was quite confounded. "The turn *has* come," he said below in the drawing-room. "My dear friends, there is *every* hope. I say so seriously. I do indeed. I am the last man in the world that would encourage vain expectations: I tell you, I am astonished at the change."

Grateful eyes were bent on this angel of good tidings: full and suffused hearts could not trust themselves to speak. "Take her out," he said, turning to Louis, and pointing to Pauline; "this fine sun will do her good. She is exhausted with all this watching, and it will give you both strength."

The faithful maid remained with Violet, who-seemed, from her soft, half-closed eyes, to be on the verge of sleep. On the last night she had slept a little. The brother and sister went out, too-grateful to omit anything they were told to do. They wandered on along a certain green lane lined with trees—a walk the sisters were fond of—for half an hour. They heard the church bells at a distance, and from the green lane could see the congregation in a gay parti-coloured ribbon unwinding from the porch. They then turned to go home, for they were fearful of staying too long, and met John Hanbury on the way. The air was delicious. The three walked together slowly, and in a low voice they told him of the happy change.

When they were not a hundred yards from home, they saw some one running to them and beckoning violently. It was the faithful maid, with a scared and terrified face. They hurried down to the house to meet her. As she passed them she did not stop, and they only caught the words, "for the doctor!"

They were in the room in a second. A frantic woman was on her knees at the bedside, tossing her arms, hardly recognisable as Mrs. Manuel. There was a face lying there, whiter than they had ever seen face before, and a sort of light seemed to flutter over it from the eyes to the lips, from the lips to the eyes back again. Sweet, soft Violet—sweet, soft, persecuted Violet—was drifting slowly away out of the rude rough waters, which had been too troubled for her gentle little soul.

As the three came round her, either the sound, or the sudden

appearance, seemed to stay that gliding progress; faint colour floated back into the pale face, the eyelids were lifted slowly; and from those eyes, not yet glazing, stole out gentle recognition. Light hovered about her lips, which seemed to move, either attempting to speak or trying to meet her sister's. Now, happily, the old troubles, the old doubts, the old expectancy—troubles, anguish, all—were dropping fast behind. Pauline stooped over, and the lips of the two sisters were pressed together. Such little power as there was left seemed to be spent in that kiss, and when Pauline raised herself, and looked down again with dim eyes, she saw a sweet and gracious tranquillity below, and a smiling repose, which told her that that little heart was no more to be fretted by man's cruelty.

All through the fatal and immemorial routine which succeeds a departure such as has been described—through the early blinding stupefaction, the dismal leading away, the horrible sense of solitude, and the tremendous and gaunt desertion which walks in and takes possession of the house like an ogre, with tears after a time beginning to flow in frantic bursts—when in this dismal succession that Sunday was nearly spent, and evening had drawn on, Pauline was sitting in the drawing-room, stiff, hard, stony, with strained eyes that had shed few tears, and had almost a fierce look. The faithful maid flitted up to her at times in alarm, and spoke to her softly and soothingly—but she did not hear.

Alarmed, the brother came down with red and swollen eyes, took her hand in his, and with a broken voice tried some of the hackneyed "common forms" of comfort. The faithful servant came and joined him, adding her voice. She, indeed, felt it as sorely as any of them, and her consolation made its way through sobs. But Pauline did not hear them. Her eyes were on some object in the window, where there was no perceptible object.

He grew alarmed. "Come, Pauline dearest, try. Do speak to us! We all feel and are heart-broken, but we must help each other. We have to live for others now!"

A flash came into Pauline's face—a flash that made him draw back. She started to her feet. With a sharp, hard tone, they heard her speak now for the first time. She said,—

"Yes. We have something else to live for, too. If I had not that to think of, I think I should lie down there and die. *I must find him.*"

CHAPTER THE FORTY-FIRST.

THE NEW PLAY.

A **LITTLE** white retiring monument in the Eastport church yard, marked with a carved violet and a simple girl's name, was beginning to turn a little grey, after two years' exposure. Over at Eastport the soft rain was dropping gently on it; but in Paris, at the same moment, a hot Paris day was fading, and French Capua, where Youth is always at the prow, and Pleasure sleepless at the helm, was getting ready for its night. Little standing armies were drawn up in rank and file at every theatre door; and in the court-yard of the Grand Sybarite Hotel, at the foot of the stone staircase, was waiting a carriage of the establishment, to take away guests to the opera or theatre.

The Sybarites had feasted some four hundred strong, and were dropping away down the steps two and three together, in a pleasant rout. The Frenchmen, very warm and mellow, like true voluptuaries, were lighting cigars and picking teeth, or abstractedly feeling their purloined sugar lumps in their pockets. The hotel was lit up. Lights flashed from the Hundred and One Bureaux. Indistinctly the stars were seen through the great glass roof over the court. There was a glimpse of Paradise at the bright café to the left, where were wandering in the sated diners to lounge on velvet. Bright clean waiter youths lolled on the great stairs and chattered; for work was done. Carriages plunging and clattering in under the porch were pulled up with violence, and, flinging out a visitor, clashed to their doors and were gone again. There was lull in the life of the huge hotel; for it had been rather spent with the grand operation just passed through, and there was a reaction. The Capuans were languid.

The carriage of the establishment had been waiting more than half an hour, when a shining boy of a waiter called from the top of the steps to the coachman to be on the alert, for his company were coming down. Presently there did come down a tall Englishman in evening uniform, with an auburn-haired girl in a white cloak upon his arm—wreath, fan, and snowy gloves. He was clean, fresh, and transparent of skin, as only Englishmen are. Two young gay waiters leaning on the balustrade smiled after them. A man in green and gold, bursting from some concealed hutch or warren, was holding the door

open magnificently, then shut it to firmly as the couple entered, and the direction was given.

Boy-waiter the first looked at his neighbour inquiringly. Boy-waiter the second answered the look in speech.

"Capitaine Anglais."

"Oui! Numero 60."

Deft handmaids had long since investigated minutely the crested ivory brushes in Numero 60,* and studied Madame's dresses, and seen on a roomy portmanteau large white initials "C. F.," and read with lame pronunciation a little card, "Captain Fermor."

Not alone the two English in the neat fiacre, but all Paris, was converging to the one theatre. They were lighting up Aladdin's Wonderful Lamps all along the magic Boulevards. Crowds of the faithful sitting at tiny marble tables, sipping from the cloudy caraffes, saw through the trees the train of dark coaches trundling by with a flare to the one spot.

The English girl-wife, sitting in the carriage of the Sybarite establishment, burst out with all a child's raptures as she saw this gay panorama pass by. She broke out with little soft spasms of rapture. "How beautiful! How lovely! O, look! Do look!" while the English captain, calm as one who had seen all the known shows of the world, does look out—as a concession to this pleasant popular humour—and says that they do these things very well on the whole.

He was pleased that she was pleased: that is, he was calmly complacent. And, as they rolled along, he did the showman as if he were goodnaturedly talking in his own grounds. There will not be so enraptured an audience at any of the theatres open to-night as his companion. It was her first night in Paris.

They got to their theatre. "Some fellow has a new play to-night," said Captain Fermor, carelessly, as he helped her out and looked round with disgust at some one who jostled him. "They *do* make such a fuss about these things in this country."

The "fellow" who had written the play was a very famous young author, who, in his round of daily life, had played many characters, and shown many profiles. He was brilliant, witty, sentimental, a petted darling of the salons, free and easy in manner, freer and easier in his life, penniless and political. In short, a true young French author. All these profiles, however,

might have shown save the last; which was the wrong one—and which he had exhibited to wrong persons. So that when the light-haired English captain and his wife—in custody of a

dreadfully business-like woman in green, armed with little footstools—were let into a box or balcony, they found it crowded to the ceiling, but with two armies mixed together below, who at the proper season would draw off and join battle.

Captain Fermor settled himself, drew his hand up and down freely over his fresh clean shirt linen (perhaps the freshest and cleanest of all shirt linen in that assembly), fetched out his glass, and did the honours of the place. The girl beside him had a round quiet soft face, that would be called handsome, with a good smile. With fresh round cheeks, that twenty years hence would be fresher and rounder, she had a smile and a laugh ever hovering—hiding, perhaps—at the corner of her mouth: which, on faint encouragement, fluttered out and across to the other side, like some of the little figures in the Strasburg clock. She was very happy at that moment, in the gay and almost exciting scene, in herself, and in the noble—almost too superior—protector and patron who sat beside her reading his bill, who was so good natured as to teach her, in reference to many of the little matters about her.

He took her through that document. "These fellows," he said, with comic pity, "will make a play out of anything. Just listen: '*L'AMOUR SE PAIE.*' This is what we have come to see, *L'Amour se Paie*. There they are, all like children down there, crushing each other flat to get their doll or bit of sugar-stick. I should like to throw it down to them—how they would struggle for it!"

The girl laughed at this pleasant way of putting the thing, and looked down at the ampitheatre of big children below. It was the most crowded play-ground they had seen for some time; but the game would presently turn out of a rough sort. A low hum and buzz rose, and nearly every one was standing up with usual optical fire-arm levelled from his eye.

Next door, as it were, were a pair of typical Frenchmen, well dined and well filled. They had about begun to live; that meal was almost the first tangible act of this day. One was black and glossy haired, with cheeks shaded over, through imperfect shaving, like parchment written upon; the other a gross swollen Frenchman, who under his waistcoat might have been corded round and round like brawn, and whose hair, black, short, and stubbly, dipped down in the centre of his forehead like the peak of a lady's waist. Both did a great deal of navy's work, with little pickaxes, about their teeth, and both contemplated the English girl with quiet and critical study,

as if she were part of the entertainment for which they had paid.

"English?" said the corded gentleman, half across his pick-axe. (He had come on a rocky and obstinate stratum.)

"Yes," said the other, also excavating; "a dish fresh and soft, too!" Both critics, calmly approbative, did not even care to drop their voices.

"Dear Charles," said the girl, delighted with everything about, "how charming all this is! It is fairy land! Oh, what a place to live in! Ah," said she, suddenly, "do you recollect Roger le Garçon, that you used to lend me? Dear me," she added, in a sort of rapture of recollection, "how pleasant all that was! Only this morning I was reading the old, old copy. But you forget."

"Ah, yes!" said he. "To be sure. You know I don't like plays. Why don't they begin in the orchestra?" Somehow, he did not dwell on the reminiscence with the same relish as she did.

"How long ago all that seems," went on the girl; "like a dream. Your going to India—and coming back again. And that poor, soft child, Violet; who had such a charming name, and turned out so cold and treacherous——"

"A year and six months," said he, in a dry key, "is a year and six months, I believe. There were things at that place, and persons at that place, one meets every day. We have done with it now, my dear child, and had better let it be, if you please."

"But, somehow," she went on, "I felt such an interest in her; almost like a sister. And I assure you," she continued, in a little confusion, "only that papa had set his heart on your marrying me—I had often begged of him to go away and leave the place; it seemed so cruel to interfere with such a soft creature as I fancied her."

Fermor coloured. "You are candid," he said, a little bitterly. It was only the first two months of their marriage, or the infusion would have been stronger. "You tell the truth, certainly. I suppose there are to be no secrets between husband and wife."

She smiled, taking this for a welcome little burst of nuptial jealousy.

"I like to talk of Eastport," she said, coquettishly, "for I was very happy there, though so ill. And yet it was all so odd, so incomprehensible."

"What, pray?" said he, suddenly.

"I mean *her* turning out such a cold, designing creature—marrying that other man. I could not have fancied it. I was so sorry, though it was so fortunate for me."

A smile of complacency struggled in Fermor's face, while he said, "And for me too, I suppose I must say."

"And oh! will you forgive me for telling you?" she went on, eagerly. "When I first heard of it, I thought the poor girl had been what they call thrown over, and I felt so much for her, that I said to papa——"

Fermor turned sharply on her. "We have come to hear this play," he said, "and to amuse ourselves, have we not? By-and-by, we shall have time enough for these reminiscences; so please, now——" And he forced the rest of the sentence into a hard smile and a harder nod.

She was sufficiently trained to see how thin the ice was about this part. And she moved away cautiously from the subject.

Three strokes of a mallet on the stage made every flower rustle its leaves as if a breeze had fluttered round, and the curtain went up.

L'Amour se Paie was after the true pattern—of which regular "forms" seem kept in stock in France. It was very long and all conversational, and shifted from Madame Hauteville's drawing-room to her garden and back again. When it came to be printed by M. Dentu of the Palais Royal, the reader found his page planted scantily with a few lines of type, and each line boasted a few meagre shrubs of words. Still it was a marvel of neat wit—wit that is fined and delicately grained with emery-powder, and real ladies and gentlemen seemed to walk from Madame Hauteville's drawing-room to her garden and back again.

The way in which the truth, or aphorism, or even hypothesis of L'Amour se Paie was set before the audience, lay in working together a financier of tempered fun, a marquise, a Paris man of fashion, a simple artless school-girl, and a "noble" tutor, suffering from his situation. All during the first act these threads were plaited languidly: a warp of conversation was woven in volubly. The exquisite showed his exquisiteness, the simple girl her simplicity, the financier his finance, and the "noble" tutor his nobleness—yet nothing had been done. As the act-drop came down there was applause from the grown children crowded below, applause met strangely by scornful laughs and a few hisses. But as yet there was nothing to applaud, nothing to

condemn ; the storming party were artfully waiting their time, until, say the end of the third act ; when, waving their red flag, they would fly at the redoubt and sack the doomed piece.

Captain Fermor, looking down from his loge, which was high enough, and from a yet higher balcon of lofty English disdain, said, with a curling lip, "And they call this thing a play, do they ? What is it all about ? Why, it isn't a patch upon the Haymarket."

The fresh soft girl knew French—that is, the French of men and women—thoroughly. Fermor had some old building materials of that tongue, bought at school, lying about in his head.

"Oh, but, Charles," she said, "that poor young man, so chivalrous——"

"Do you mean that whining tutor ?" he said, contemptuously. "The whole thing is a bore. It must fail. I wish," he added, putting up his hand politely to stop a yawn, "I wish we had gone to that other thing, what d'ye call it—spectacle."

The two Frenchmen still looked at the English lady steadily. The corded one—mellow with good Medoc and coffee, and a little cognac on the surface of the coffee, which, coming so near the top, gave his cheeks and eyes a warm inflamed tone—approved. He nodded approval to his neighbour. He was thinking how it would be compatible with his other little engagements—he would make up his mind before the play was over.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-SECOND.

A MEETING.

SECOND act. The mournful tutor was leaning his forehead on his hand and trying to read. For six francs a day he had to come and give a lesson to the simple girl whom he loved. She *has* loved her tutor, because, as she told her friend, Made-moiselle Laroux, "he was the first man I had ever seen, just as I was éprise of my first doll." In truth, she had a leaning to the exquisite, who was so pleasant with his Paris talk. Financier again, tutor, marquise, school-girl, all in a check pattern of talk ; but no serious work.

At that moment there was a rustle and noise of moving

chairs close beside the English lady and gentleman, with the sound of a box-door closing like the click of a trigger. Three seats had been vacant the whole night, guarded jealously. These were now at last to be filled. Then there came boldly down to the front, where she stayed a moment drawn up to her full height for the house to admire, a tall figure, brilliant, flashing under the lights with every motion. A few beings of the parterre, not engaged in tumult, instantly turned their backs to the stage and levelled their glasses with effrontery. With her also came a square-built young man, with vellum cheeks and thoughtful meditative eyes, and a second gentleman. But they were in cold colours—dull sketches in greys and neutral tints, beside *her*. They sat down together. She continued to draw all eyes. It was that bright radiant look which seemed to reflect back the radiance. Her rich black hair flashed back the light from a hundred ripples. It hung over her white forehead, and was gathered away to the right and left like the heavy folds of a curtain. Her face was oval, her eyebrows marked and arched, her eyes liquid and dark, and though brilliant, were not sharp nor piercing, and, above all, her face seemed to be lit up from within. But among the folds and draperies of her hair (and this the opera-glass musketeers in the parterre noted specially) was a rich scarlet geranium placed with excellent effect, and, carelessly dropping from her shoulders, was an Eastern black and gold opera-cloak. She might be a Jewess or a Spaniard.

The English girl was absorbed in the tutor and his woes. She had never seen anything so delightful. Fernor, with a curl of depreciation on his lip, seen under the black opera-glass, was slowly travelling round the house.

"I never saw such an exhibition," said he, not taking the glass from his eyes; "but we must stay it out, for I suspect there will be—" He stopped suddenly, for the two muzzles of his glass were resting on the new faces just come in. The glass dropped on his knees. Then he gave a half-start; half rose, and sank again into his chair.

His eyes were fixed on the apparition of the bright lady and her two companions. A few "amateurs" in the parterre were looking also; but the whole house was absorbed in the play. The girl beside Fernor, with tearful earnest eyes, and the round chin resting on her hand, was wrapped up in the young tutor. There was such agony, such suffering in his face—that—

Suddenly she heard her husband whisper hoarsely—

"We must go away now. Come! quick!"

She came back to practical life.

"Go away!" she said, in blank astonishment. "Why? Oh no, no! Just at this point, too!"

"I am sick of it," said he, rising. "I have a headache. I suppose you will not ask me to stay if I am ill?"

She rose in a second, and gathered up her cloak and "matériel." She looked back wistfully at the noble young tutor, whose face showed actual writhings of moral suffering; his sense of the degradation of his position was so very acute. As she turned to go, her cloak caught in a chair and overturned it. A flash of faces was turned to them, and a subdued "ts—s—" was heard.

"There! they will all see us!" said Fermor, with something like ferocity, "and you knew I wanted to get out without noise!"

He caught her arm roughly, and hurried her away.

She was frightened. "What is the matter, Charles?" she said again.

"Nothing, nothing," he said, shortly. "I did not say anything was. Please don't tease me, and let us get home in quiet."

He hurried her along the great passages. They got to the top of the flight of stairs.

"Take my arm!" he said.

But there, at the same point, they were met by another party going away. It was the brilliant lady and her companions, who could not have heard a sentence of the new play, and were literally going away almost as soon as they had come. A strange proceeding.

Though in sore trouble, the girl was struck by the brightness of the Spanish-looking face and the flashing of her beauty, which she had now seen for the first time. "Oh look, look, Charles!" she was whispering, hurriedly; when, to her amazement, the lady came to meet them.

"Captain Fermor," said the stranger, and in her voice there was a sustained chanting sound almost melancholy, "what a meeting! This is strange, and curious! And at a theatre, of all places in the world!"

Fermor was not yet composed enough to answer steadily. His lips were trembling. He forced a kind of smile.

"Not forgotten me, surely?" said the lady. "You remember when we last met, or when we *were* to have met?"

"Yes," said Fermor, faintly.

"And this," she said, "is Mrs. Fermor? I was sure of it,

even at a distance. I was one of your husband's old acquaintances. One of the crowd whom he has paid visits to, and taken down to supper, but whose name he has forgotten by next morning."

Fermor was now collected enough to speak as Fermor was accustomed to speak.

"We are going home—," he said; "a stupid play, that has given me a headache."

"How long do you remain in this place?" said the Spanish lady, abruptly, addressing Mrs. Fermor.

The latter, who had been looking at the strange lady quite fascinated, answered hastily, "Oh—we are to stay a month, I believe."

Fermor struck in hurriedly, "No, no. We leave to-morrow; we are obliged to return. Got a letter to-day."

"Stay a month? Leave to-morrow?" said the Spanish lady, with a smile. "Your plans are scarcely decided. You recollect my brother?" she added. "This is Mr. Romaine, his friend."

"I am afraid," said Fermor, "we must go away now. We——"

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Grand Hotel," said the English girl, who was addressed.

"Oh, then we shall see you there. Ours is Number 110. We have hardly chosen our rooms yet. But we shall see each other very often, and renew an old acquaintance. Indeed, we shall come and see you to-morrow," said the Spanish-looking lady, gaily. "Louis and I. You will be at home at twelve?"

"Yes, yes," said Fermor, hastily. "Delighted. To-morrow, at twelve."

"Good night, then," said the Spanish-looking lady. "I am so glad to have met you again. This is life, you see, all over, parting in a ball-room—meeting at a theatre. Now, Mr. Romaine, be bitter on that text."

Mr Romaine—whose face had a handsome gauntness, and whose black eyes, and whose black moustache hanging like curls over his mouth, had an odd attraction for Mrs. Fermor—said something in a low voice to his friend.

"Ah, exactly," said the Spanish lady. "To-morrow, then, at twelve. Good night."

In the dark carriage, where Fermor's face could not be seen, the wife began to talk and wonder.

"And you have forgotten her name?" she said suddenly. "Are you certain? How wonderful! I should have remembered that splendid face till my dying day. I shall long to see her again."

"Yes," said he, catching at what she had suggested; "it is not odd. I shall recollect it later, I suppose."

"It is so strange," she said; "if I had seen a *man* with such a face, I should never have forgotten his name."

Fermor, moody and gloomy, said impatiently, "I dare say—no doubt. Don't ask me why this, and why that, and wonder at me for this and that. I have a headache, and the racket of this place is enough to give one a hundred headaches."

She was full of concern in a moment.

"How thoughtless and stupid I am!" she said. "Why did you not tell me?"

At their hotel the green and gold official came rushing, and opened the door, as if it were a matter of life and death they should be extricated at once. The great stairs flashed out white and spacious. The sleepless Bureaux, where the lights blazed, were busy with their entries and erasures of arrivals and departures day and night long: of what were, in fact, the Births and Deaths to the Grand Hotel and its monster family.

At the top of the stairs Fermor stopped short suddenly. "What a place!" he said. "I am sick of their noise and flurry. One can't get a minute's quiet here. Look there! What did I say?"—as another carriage clattered in. "We must leave early in the morning, and go to some Christian place."

Deeply concerned for the pain which he must be suffering, she answered, eagerly, "Yes, Charles. Anywhere. Or what would you say—could we not go now?"

It was hardly nine o'clock.

"A very good idea," he said with real pleasure. "You could put your things together, and send for the boxes in the morning. You are a clever child, and a ready child too."

Greatly elated by this unusual commendation, she tripped away. He went down to the Bureaux, where they were so busy with the Births and Deaths. This was to be a Death, for he was going to ask for his bill. As he came out suddenly, a lady and gentleman, who had descended from the carriage, stopped him.

"Home again," she said, "and we just as soon as you."

Fermor began to bite his moustache.

In a moment a waiter came to him with a strip of paper, and asked would monsieur have a carriage?

"So you are going away?" said the Spanish lady. "Only think, Louis! At this hour, too. Surely not. Recollect, you were to have seen us to-morrow. You made an appointment."

Fermor crushed up the paper. "We had to alter our arrangements," he said. "We are obliged to go. We have very little time. So——"

"No, no," said the Spanish lady, smiling, and shaking her head. "This is a little fourberie—some of the old, old phantoms. Don't you recollect when we lived at Eastport, and when we were all so happy together? I dare say you have told her all about the time. No, you can't go to-night. Where is Mrs. Fermor? I shall easily persuade *her*. Send up for her."

Fermor looked at the lady doubtfully and irresolutely, still crumpling the paper.

"No, no," she said, with encouragement. "To-morrow morning is more rational. More like a calm, sensible Englishman. Above all, when we meet an old friend, whom we have not seen for so long, and whom a mere chance has helped us to meet. Do oblige me in this. Let us sit down here awhile in Paradise, in the Arabian Nights! There are a hundred things I want to ask you—a hundred things *you* will want to hear from me. It will be old times returned over again."

There was something almost fascinating in her face and voice. Fermor, bewildered, confused, above all, surprised at the strange change in her—at the lightness and airiness of her manner (for she seemed a new Pauline)—made no resistance, but passed out with her into the bright colonnade where the thousand-and-one tables are clustered, and the clink of glass and china furnishes music.

Five minutes later came tripping down the young Mrs. Fermor. She was ready, and her little packing all done. But her husband was gone. A little confused from the sense of this desertion, she went in to the Bureau.

Numero 60. Yes. Monsieur had been furnished with the bill. A little fit of curiosity came over her at that moment, and she thought she would refresh her husband's memory about the lady at the theatre—pleasantly surprising him with superior information. Who were in Numero 110?

A few pages turned over with complaisance, and the young lady registrar answered—

"Numero 110 et 111, Monsieur et Mdlle. Manuel."

The young girl started. At the same moment an obliging young boy-waiter came to tell her that "Mr. the Captain" was outside in the café, sitting with a lady.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-THIRD.

THE COLONNADE OF THE GRAND HOTEL.

UNDER that colonnade, and in the cool air, with carriage-lights twinkling past, and seen through the leaves of the trees, as though in a garden—with airy waiters flitting by, the English lady and gentleman sat at coffee. It was the best scenery in the world for confidence.

Every moment he was more and more amazed at the change in her

She was a new Pauline, older, yet "finer," more dazzling more splendid, more womanly; more decided, too, in manner—firmer, and more distinct in her voice. She was leaning over the little marble table, looking at him earnestly as she talked.

"Two years is a long time," she said, sadly; "I seem to have lived a quarter of a century. A thousand events have been crowded into that time, Spain, France, England—Spain again. We have been always travelling. It," she added, in a low voice, "it was the only thing. Rest seemed like death."

Fermor dropped his eyes. "And Spain," he said, absently; "why Spain again?"

"Ah," she said, "our poor mother, you know. It was *her* country, and it was natural that she should like to see it before she died. Old people somehow think of these things. We had money, thank God. Her cousin left her everything. But she did not enjoy it long. Poor mamma."

"Good God!" said Fermor, in some distress. "Is she too——? I did not hear—I did not, indeed. I have heard nothing. I was so far away, or I should have written."

Pauline laughed, a laugh faintly harsh, which was one of the changes he had noted in her.

"Written!" she said. "Why so? There was no reason in the world for *that*. We wanted no consolation from any one. You saw very little of her. I can fancy, too, in India, with precious

time taken up—every moment of it. I have often heard what strain is put there on men of capacity.”

Fermor looked at her a little uneasily; but the large eyes seemed to be fixed on him with perfect honesty.

“Yes,” he said, “they *did* work us there. But I am so grieved to hear this. And when?”

“O, long ago! A few months after you—had left. She was half a Spaniard, and very sensitive and delicate; and our poor Violet’s—death—took hold of her mind a good deal, and, at last, unsettled it a little. You might have remarked how she doted on *her*—more, I believe, a great deal, than on me.”

There was a silence for some moments. Then Fermor said, in a low voice—

“And she—Violet—poor Violet—I am glad you have mentioned it—I have often, I assure you, thought of it, and of that night, and what my conduct must have appeared. And I was—nearly maddened when I heard it. But you know,” he added, eagerly; “*what* could I do? I don’t like speaking of it, it is so distressing a business, and has ended so unfortunately; but *do* make allowance—put yourself in my position.”

“Surely, surely,” said Pauline, hurriedly. “There is no need to take *that* view of it. After all, it is different with me, you know. Sisters will be sisters, and I,” she added, more quickly, “had an affection for her that was almost extravagant. But *that* is all my concern, you see. I must keep my own sufferings for myself. She was a child, too soft and tender for life. Had she been a girl,” added Pauline earnestly, “she would have lived.”

She seemed to laugh, and Fermor saw a film gathering over her eyes. She brushed it away hastily. “Is not all this absurd?” she said. “And so long as two years ago!”

Fermor was all softened. The picture of poor Violet came back on him with a pang of self-reproach—yet pleasing self-reproach.

“I know, I know,” he said again, eagerly, “what you, what she, must have thought. That wretched business, I confess, *had* an odious look. I want to clear myself to you. But, if you had been behind the scenes, and seen what pressure——”

“Of course,” said she. “Quite so. A mere ordinary affair. I suppose five thousand things of the same sort go on every year in England. Foolish girls take fancies, and men, not so foolish, are naturally flattered; and so it goes on for a time. Then it is discovered that the whole is impracticable and will never do. Intellect must have something more to lean on than mere love

and worship. And so the whole vanishes in a pretty cloud of romance."

"Exactly," said Fermor, eagerly. "You understand, I see."

"Your friends," said she, with eyes fixed on him, "naturally wished to see you advance in the world. You had brilliant prospects, abilities, good interest, and it was a pity to sacrifice them."

"Quite so," said Fermor again. "You quite understand it. It was a youthful attachment, but you know it would have ruined me. It was better for *both* in the end."

"Exactly," she said; "much better for both. You say it was the only sensible course, after all. Of course you are right. Only a man of firmness and resolution could see it in *that* light. One of your weak youths would have plunged headforemost with her into ruin, and let the future take care of itself."

"I considered," said Fermor, growing quite eager in his exculpation, "that I was bound to look to *her* as well as to myself. Far more, indeed. I know human nature pretty well. I have, in fact, made it a practical study. I knew there would be some suffering at first; but that pain would be far better than ten times that suffering later. I assure you I had a principle in it all."

Pauline's face was growing intensely earnest and vindictive as she listened. When he looked up, the expression changed suddenly. Her eyes were fixed on him with a greater and greater earnestness. But he did not see how her lips were compressed. "Yes?" she said, with an interrogative anxiety. "Go on."

"We can't be always wise. As you say, the next best thing after a mistake is to see that it *is* a mistake. I saw it the very next day."

"*You did?*" she asked, with a sudden energy that would have startled another; then added, hastily: "To be sure. Sensible always. We are only women, after all."

"Poor child!" he went on. "Another would have been blunt, and spoken at once. I thought it better to trust to time and chance, those two great contrivers."

Again her eyes were fixed on him with a strange and almost deadly expression. "*You did?*" she said. "That was the plan, was it? I see. And it succeeded."

He looked up in a little surprise.

"Poor, poor Violet!" she suddenly broke out. "Poor, sweet, wretched darling! To be handed over to chance and time, those two great contrivers! What a life! Why could we not

have saved her, poor, lost darling? Time and chance!" and she gave one of the strange laughs. "That was the secret, was it? But we should have had a stronger and less delicate subject to practise on. Oh, Violet! Violet!"

Her face dropped upon the little marble table, and Fermor heard her hysterical sobs as she stayed in this position for many minutes. He was greatly distressed, almost shocked, at the violence of this grief, and tried to soothe her. In a few moments she raised her face and wiped her eyes. "This is very foolish," she said. "We women should train ourselves. But it does me good to think and talk of all this; it brings relief. It has quite comforted me, meeting you. We must have many a talk on this matter in London and here. But you go tomorrow. Of course you have your duties, and cannot waste time on a poor lonely sister like me."

She looked at him with a sort of shy fascination, and her voice was very musical and melancholy. "Twelve o'clock!" she said, rising suddenly; "how time has flown!"

"Good gracious!" he said, for the first time thinking of Mrs. Fermor. "So late! Yes, I shall see you again. We are not bound to a day. But I am so glad you have taken a calm, sensible view of this affair, as, indeed, I anticipated you would."

"Ah, yes! Let us go in now," she said. They went into the great court. It was almost deserted. But the sleepless Bureaux were still at work. At the bottom of the great stair she said "Good night."

She followed him with her eyes as he ascended slowly: when he reached the top, he looked down and saw her figure in a wonderful attitude of grace. He thought again of the curious changes that had taken place in her. "What a crisis," he said, as he looked down, "to pass through! How would a less skillful man have done?"

At that distance he could not see her face, nor the features in her face. But the eyes were flashing. And he could not hear the hard voice that came from the lips—

"It was, then, his own work; and he is satisfied! That was my only doubt. Before God, then, I shall not spare him!"

Once more, at the door of the lobby, he looked down, and saw her hand raised towards him. Complacently, he thought it was a salutation, and he waved his own to her. Then went his way along the galleries. There was a smile on his face as he passed along: it was softened to a gentle feeling of romance very pleasurable. He thought he had got through

that very well—cleverly, rather. She was a lady, and had taken a good common-sense view. "My life," he thought, "has been a strange one. It might be written in a book. And which of us can tell what is coming on either?"

He found the young wife up, waiting. She had been writing—writing home to her father. He required one letter every day, without fail.

"I was having some coffee out on the Boulevards," said Fermor. "So sorry to have kept you; met a friend."

There was a curious look on the young wife's face, a colder one than he had ever seen.

"Tell me about it," she said, calmly. "An old friend, or a new one? Had he anything to tell?"

Fermor walked to the window impatiently. "Nothing that you would care to hear," he said. "By the way, we need not be hurrying away in the morning. There is no necessity for such a precipitate departure. It would look absurd. We should be having the police after us!" He said this as though *she* had been proposing and pressing it.

"Just as you please," she said.

Her passiveness mystified him. But no more was said on the matter.

On the next day, about two o'clock, Captain Fermor fixed a flower in his button-hole, chose out a new pair of gloves, put some perfume on his handkerchief, and sent up to Numero 110, to know if Mademoiselle Manuel was at home. "I have not talked to a clever woman I don't know when," he said; "I must tell her the whole story about poor Violet from the very beginning." He had, in fact, prepared a dramatic little narrative, in which he himself was painted as an object of great interest.

The boy-waiter came with word that Mr. and Miss Manuel had left for London by the early train that morning.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-FOURTH.

THE HOUSE IN ALFRED-PLACE.

IN time, over an interval of two months. In space, from Paris to London. From the Grand Hôtel to a bright cozy compact house—one of a clean series in Alfred-place, stand-

ing together like a row of Sunday-school children. Neighbours hardly knew who lived there, but the number was down in the note-books, and in the minds of many skilful men; was familiar at the Great Literary Club, and the name of Pauline Manuel lifted many faces from the *Times* or *Globe*. Among these was the face of, say, a herculean humorist who growled sourly at a hollow world—over good claret; the faces of leading witty men who brought their jokes and quips to dinners, like conjurors bringing their apparatus to a child's party, and who, like the conjurors, would not be received without their apparatus; of leading clergymen, hard thoughtful men, who dug and trenched in the heavy soil of reviews; of younger and more unclerical men, who did the ornamental gardening of magazines; of a placid Italian barytone, gentleman in everything save birth; of a bishop or two; of a doctor or two; of a lawyer or two; or a member of Parliament or two. These, with the faces of their wives, were Pauline Manuel's constituency—a miniature world in itself. In that small house in Alfred-place was a small round table that held eight or ten; it was lighted by white Dresden candelabra, and the light fell usually on a witty face, a clerical-reviewing face, a singing, a barristerial, a senatorial, or an editorial face. They were delightful little meals—complete—choice in all points.

How she drifted into such circles, or rather how they came floating and drifting about her, was through the mere general attraction which a bright, flashing, dazzling face, a face that people looked long after in the street, always exercises. Lord Puttenham, who had but one standard of beauty, said she was "like Grisi in her best days." To the house in Alfred-place came fossil old noblemen, like Lord Gilliflower, about as infirm as old furniture; tall, florid, general officers, as fond of the warm rays of beauty as of sitting in the sun; lively wives of lively men; in short, a delightful miscellany. At Alfred-place were the most delightful of morning calls, where new music was heard, and new painting worked at; of afternoon visits, where tea was drunk, and talk mixed with the tea, like cream, and where the little dinner was spread; from Alfred-place went the pleasant party to opera or play, and to Alfred-place came home the pleasant party from opera or play to the little supper on the round table. All liked her. Older acquaintances were eager to know her better; others outside were struggling and canvassing to be admitted. It was noted how eager she was to extend her list. She wished to know everybody.

"You only care for new faces," said Mr. Fobley of the Guards; "never saw anything like it. Half a dozen in the day—like new gloves."

Pauline, who had for many minutes been eagerly searching a gay crowd, turned on him a gay smile. "I do," she said; "I like variety. The man from Covent-garden changes these flowers for me every second day. Mr. Griesbach," she said to that reviewer of Gibbon, Pitt, the War of the Succession, and of other heavy men and subjects, "being at a window and seeing the people go by all day long, that is the true notion of life! Don't you think so?"

When a new soldier came home from the Caroo Islands, or a new sailor from the Main, she always said to some of her staff, "Bring him to me." Travellers of any degree she relished, making them sit down beside her. The young soldier would think fatuously of his own charms, the seaman would glow with his pinkest blushes.

"Oh," she would say, "I have known so many who have gone out *there*. It must be delightful. I envy you all."

"We were up at Yalalabad, you know," the fatuous youth would say. "I and Filmer and old Jekyl. We used to dine with the Commissioner, an old Scotchman, with a daughter, and——"

"Did you ever meet with Sir Hopkins Pocock out there?"

"Who? Never heard of him—who's he?"

"Oh, nothing," said she. "An old friend—I only thought you might have——"

From that instant the youth—and he was but a type of many more who suffered under the same process—found the soft warm water growing suddenly colder, until he had to leap out and fly in confusion. So with an agreeable traveller, newly returned and writing a book—"Six months with the Queen of Bushra"—Bushra was not far, that is to say, less than six hundred miles, from Sir Hopkins's government. Oh yes, he had made an excursion as he came home—governor civil enough—wanted him (the traveller) to dine with him, but he didn't. Saw nothing—saw nobody—heard nothing, and heard of nobody. But the Queen of Bushra gave him a bracelet of teeth, which she had gathered with her own hands. Then the water grew icy cold with startling suddenness.

So with the tourist, the author of the lively journal "From Spa to Spa." "You meet all sorts of people at those wicked places, Mr. Duncan Davis," she would say, with a smile, "and

touch them off *so* cleverly. I sat up till one last night reading the book you sent me. I have friends that go every year, and can tell me nothing. By the way, did you ever fall in with a Mr. Carter and his family?"

"Carter, Carter!" said Mr. Duncan Davis, searching the old closet he called his memory. "Yes, to be sure, at Nauheim. There was a Carter there."

Pauline's face grew very eager. "You did?" she said. "Tell me about him—you quite interest me."

"To be sure," said Duncan Davis. "I knew him intimately. He was the chaplain, and had the English chapel, and daughters, and——"

But some one had turned the cruel cock, and the water again grew icy cold. Duncan Davis was never allowed to tell more of the Nauheim chaplain.

Such had been Pauline's life, and Pauline's curious purpose of general inquiry had been noted by a few gentlemen as a phase of fascinating oddity. The wives of the gentlemen—strongly intellectual in their way, and whose voices rang out at dinner sharp and clear as their lords'—were pleasant on this fancy, and hinted at the supposed matrimonial end of all society.

"With so large a net, my dear," said Mrs. Winslow Jones, "she will have a salmon one of these mornings." This drawing in of her net was delightful to all assistants, for the fisherwoman's voice was so gay and so fascinating. Her talk was a sort of moderated burlesque—a softened comic exaggeration—a dressing up of light flying topics in quaint, sober, solemn language. Then her deep limpid eye flashed, the bells began to ring, and the music to play. But when the lights were down, and the social theatre closed for the night, the deep eyes grew dull, the clouds began to gather, and an old look of weary restlessness, which seemed the reflection, as in a glass, of a heavier and a yet wearier restlessness, now more than two years old, came and settled on her face. These two looks were familiar and habitual with Pauline, during this year or two. The first the world saw: the second, only that gloomy brother, now grown yet more gloomy.

In a mean street—that hung like a torn bit of ribbon from the skirt of Belgrave-square—and in a rather mean house (but which was let, as birds'-nests are sold in China, for its weight in silver), Lady Laura Fermor and her band had thrown up fresh works. Flushed with recent success, she had seen the truth that all things naturally tend to the centre and to the metro-

polis; and she was now operating from a sort of "pah" in town.

Again, at pleasant chambers in St. James's-square, the special morning paper whose function it is to calculate the right ascension of the fashionable heavenly bodies, announced that Sir Hopkins Pocock had recently arrived. The Eastern dependency had not been so skilfully manipulated as the Waipiti. With those intractable savages he had won glory; more civilised beings he had badly mismanaged. He was recalled a little abruptly. His staff and dependents fell with him; and Sir Hopkins Pocock, C.B., returned to England, his health having broken down sadly, as we all well knew.

In Clarges-street, too, idlers, and neighbours who were idlers, had noticed men, like shipwrights on a ship's side, busy burnishing and scouring a model house from top to bottom; and at whose door a little later, great wains were seen disgorging furniture from their dark jaws, like whales on wheels. The more curious saw, four days later, that there was a tall, grim, stiff gentleman, whose name was Carlay, in possession, and who was expecting home his married daughter and her husband, who were to live with him.

These are little strands which are to make up the cord. The weaving was now to begin.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-FIFTH.

A VISIT.

DURING these days there was often sitting in Pauline's drawing-room, and almost at Pauline's feet, the chair was so very low, the gauntly handsome Mr. Romaine who had been of her party at the French play. He was one of the travellers whom she had sent for, and who had been contemptuously turned away with the rest, when it was found that there was no profit in him; but he had declined to accept that furlough. It suited him to stay. His cheeks were well tanned, even to a hard red: his cheek-bones were high and glossy, there was much of his neck seen; he had shiny eyes in deep ambuscade, and a glossy overhanging moustaché. Yet he was tall, manly, gaunt, *alive*, and, when he choose, soft as a woman. He was one of

those men who put up a dozen guns for luggage, and go and range among the poor wild beasts, who no doubt wonder what manner of wild beasts these are that come to their forests to scatter fire and smoke, and the sharp report, and the smashing stroke, and the cruel agony. He had gone among odd tribes—blacks, and greys, and red-coloured—and received the freedom of their wigwams, and had been offered wives in profusion, and had written very agreeable narratives of his adventure of Ulalumai, or the Tawny River. The Great Circulator took five hundred copies.

He was not married, and never would marry; but liked to scoff and gird at women with politeness; sitting at their feet (on low chairs) and telling of his rough sports—a sort of Othello in outline. To hear these matters *they* did indeed seriously incline. There had been a lady whom he called Virginia Grammont, whom he loved to entertain in this fashion, on whose low chair he sat, whom he taught, scolded, carped at, complimented, sneered at, but regarded in some sort as his own special property. At the hour of four every second day, he took her as regularly as he would his cigar, or dinner. She was a sort of book—more a pamphlet he would have said—for him. He *required* her. She, of course, was of the gay young condottieri who scour the ball-rooms. Here making war for “an idea” does not obtain, and *could* not obtain. For, speaking metaphorically, how are horses and forage, and caparisons and accoutrements, and subsistence, to be found on such terms? Therefore, suddenly one day she became Mrs. Massinger. Mr. Romaine was thrust with a shock from the low chair.

He was in a fury. He raged as if some personal injury had been done to him. He would have liked to have gone out with a rifle and shot Massinger like a panther. But Mr. and Mrs. Massinger were away, going to spend the winter at Rome. He now discovered that he loved this girl. The gaunt face glowed with colour; the man who had seen savage women until he had begun to think the whole sex mere cattle, was in sore distress.

He had begun to know Pauline about this time. She laughed openly at his troubles; fanciful, she called them. He did not much care how she received them; all he wanted was some one to make company while he talked, and sometimes “crooned” over himself, and more often sprang from the low chair, and tramped heavily up and down with long strides on her carpet. She bore with him patiently, and often without

speaking, sometimes throwing on fuel, as it were a log of wood, quietly.

"This is all your own pride, which has been touched," she would say. On this he would stop his striding, pulling himself up, as if he were a strong horse, and would begin champing his bit impatiently, and pawing the carpet, fixing on her a strange half fierce look from his bright eyes. Then he launched into harangues, half invective and half expostulation. This was one pattern of many such scenes. It fell in with his daily life, and about every second or third afternoon a huge rough poncho of his was lying on the hall table, and the heavy hollow beat of his stride was heard on the floor overhead.

The house in Alfred-place had a balcony, which was a perfect garden. From the top of the street was seen what looked like a flower-bed in the air—luxuriant greenery, hanging and clustering, with large bright patch of rich red, so that strangers and passers-by often turned down the street to get a nearer view. A yet brighter patch of colour attracted them when the face of the mistress was seen bent down over her flowers. Not that she fancied gardening, but as she once said in her odd way to Lord Puttenham, who had protested that his gardener should send up a box of rare cuttings and roots from Puttenham, "She liked flowers, because they were *sure* to die."

Thus was she, one evening about four o'clock, bent down over the balcony, pulling away a living leaf as often as a dead one. The little street was deserted, never at any time having much traffic. Two figures had walked past the top—two girls, as they seemed—who were caught by the bright flash in the balcony, and came down slowly to see better. As they came under, they looked up with women's delight in flowers, and Miss Manuel, who did not care to look at any faces, could not help seeing the upturned ones through the green leaves.

In a second she had flown back into her room, and rang the bell. "Ask that lady to come in," she said to her servant. "Bring her in; and if she refuses, call me." The servant bowed, and Pauline, shooting a glance round the room, said aloud, "Ah! they are come at last, and it is full time to begin."

It was a lady and her maid that were admiring the flowers. The servant did his office so gravely, discreetly, and impressively, that the lady hovered timorously on the steps. There was a mesmeric influence of cold respect about his sad sphinx eyes which seemed to draw the young Mrs. Fermor inside the open door.

"I am afraid," she said, "That is—really I don't know the lady——"

"I think she knows you. She is waiting, ma'am, for you in the drawing-room," said the menial of the stony eyes; and then there came a melodious voice from the stairs, and the figure of Pauline glided towards her. She brought her in, and the cold-eyed closed the door as though he had been a jailor. From this afternoon it all began.

Young Mrs. Fermor, overcome, and timorous, made as though she would go away again. "You remember that night at the play?" said Pauline, leading her prisoner into the drawing-room, as though it had been a strong-room. "Of course you forget my face. I do not forget yours. The moment I saw you in the box I had a sort of instinct who it was. You must know me, and I want you to like me."

The young girl recollected that theatre very well, and when she was looking up admiring the flowers, also recollected the face she had seen through the leaves. Soft and gentle as she was, and not likely to be flurried into speechless confusion, as hapless Violet would have been, she looked at Pauline, and said—

"After a time I shall try and know you very well indeed. I have only seen you once, recollect, and that for a moment."

Pauline smiled. "You have seen more of the world than I have. I wish I had that wise caution. Sit down, won't you, and let us talk? Or, first, let me apologise," added Pauline, dropping her eyes humbly, "for violently carrying you into the house. You have a hundred things to do, I am sure; and now that I have seen you and spoken to you——"

A hundred feelings were working in Mrs. Fermor's mind. She recollected the night at the Grand Hotel, and she had accepted her husband's forgetfulness of the lady as though it were truth. But this had not passed out of her mind; it had only been packed up carefully and put by. That little compliment about knowing the world better than the grand, flashing creature before her, had some little sweetness—there was curiosity to know more, to discover more; and so she did not rise to go away.

"We ought to know each other well," said Pauline, after a pause, "after all that has happened. It is so curious, our sitting this way together, we two—of all people in the world. There are some—pray forgive me—who could not bear to look at you."

Mrs. Fermor smiled. She was thinking that winners should be gracious always, and could afford to bear much.

"I don't know what to say," she said; "these things *will* come about."

"Of course," said the other, "of course. Well, you are tired of our story and our woes. He has told you of it over and over again—every minute detail—until you are sick of the whole business. He has described everything to you over and over again."

The girl coloured. "No, indeed," she said; "I had no curiosity. I never asked him."

"Never told you!" said Pauline. "I should have thought it had been the one subject of his mind. It should have been burnt into his brain. I should fancy its haunting him like a nightmare. *You* would fancy so too! Naturally so, only that the subject would not be so welcome to a young wife. You have fitted up your skeleton-closet already, my dear child. No matter; it does as well as other furniture. You are very happy, of course—while that poor darling—you will say at least hers, my sister's, was a very cruel fate."

"Why," said young Mrs. Fermor, "is *she* not happy?"

Pauline looked at her. "So do you take the *trouble* of acting with me?"

"I protest," said the other, warmly, "I know nothing—and have heard nothing. Was not her marriage happy?"

Pauline started, gave a half cry. "Marriage! What marriage? Ah, she *was* to have been married. Ah! now I see. They have not told you anything. He thought it was better not—as it was only one of the old, old pathetic romantic stories."

Mrs. Fermor was troubled; she looked wondering and timorous at Pauline.

"Why, she died," the latter went on, speaking fast, "poor sweet child! foolishly, I think. Some would have lived on through everything; *she* was only a child, and the idea of being deserted wore her out of life."

"Deserted!" said the other, starting up. "Oh no! no! Why, I was told——"

"Oh, of course," said Pauline, standing up also, her cheeks glowing; "these were too ugly ideas to be introduced to a young bride! Ah! and yet it was a cruel, cruel story!"

Young Mrs. Fermor, shocked and wounded, could only say, "I never heard, indeed I did not. Oh, this is dreadful; the poor, poor child! I am so grieved."

Pauline looked at her half scornfully.

"That should be all over now, and time should have healed—what's the phrase? Yes, Mrs. Fermor, death had to be called in to make a place for *you*. In some of the long nights, get Captain Fermor to tell you all the details. By and by, you will discover other secrets which he has not yet told you. But all in good time."

Mrs. Fermor was all confused, almost overwhelmed by this news, and looked at her helplessly. Just then the door opened sharply, and a heavy figure swung in. It was the Mr. Romaine, who was so handsomely gaunt.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-SIXTH.

MR. ROMAINE.

HIS tread became heavy, as he saw there was some one else present. He flung himself with open ill humour on to a seat, casting a look of impatience at the lady in shawl and bonnet, who was so perversely in the way.

"This is Mrs. Fermor; don't you remember, Mr. Romaine? You were introduced before; for shame!"

Romaine looked at her angrily; pushed the low chair back.

"I want to recollect as little as I can, as you know," he said, bluntly; "I am sick of remembering."

"You have been in France——" said Pauline. "Yet no Frenchman would have made such a speech."

"Frenchman!" he said, with contempt. "I mean no offence to your visitor, and if any one is offended, I am sure I am ready to apologise. But I say still, thank God I am not a Frenchman. Better the lowest English boor before that!"

He thus artfully escaped a special acquaintance with the visitor, keeping her under the general category of "a lady." Young Mrs. Fermor—not yet recovered from the strange things she had been hearing; and this wonder mixed itself with yet another wonder at this strange person, also with a little pique at his rudeness—said, softly, "I am not the least offended. I must say a word, though, for our low English boors; I have always found *them* polite."

She said this very naturally, and perhaps meant nothing

special, after all. Pauline smiled. Romaine looked at Mrs. Fermor fixedly for a moment.

He said nothing, but got up and began to pace. "I hear, after all," he said, "they will not go to Rome. That fellow has listened to reason at last."

"To the doctors?" said Pauline.

"To *reason*, I said!" he replied, stopping suddenly before them, laughing grimly. "Poor Virginia's chest is made of gauze; a Roman winter for *her*—God help her, when it all begins so wisely as *that*, how will it go on?"

"O, very well," said Pauline, calmly; "he will make a very good serviceable creature; kind and thoughtful, better than a hundred of your showy theatrical men, who wish marriage to be *all* Husband, and Lord, and a Hairdresser's Bust."

Young Mrs. Fermor sighed deeply, and even loudly. Pauline's eyes floated round significantly to Mr. Romaine's eyes. That sigh saved ten minutes' explanation afterwards. Then Mrs. Fermor rose to go. She bowed with a timidity not unacceptable to him, who returned it with a gracious ungraciousness. Pauline went out with her.

"You must excuse him," she said; "he is in an odd state at present, and we have all to humour him. A girl he liked has just married, and he is suffering, poor soul. Shall we see each other soon? I want you to like me. I do indeed. I live in the solitude of the world. I have no one to care for me since my poor darling was taken from me. You *know* it was hard, since she was not to go with him, that she could not have stayed with us. Won't you try to like me?"

Mrs. Fermor saw her eyes glistening. She was conqueror, and could be generous. Pressing her hand, she said, "Indeed I will."

Coming back to her drawing-room, Pauline found the steady pacing going on.

"You seem to have a good deal to say at the door there," he said. "Is the lobby to become the drawing-room?"

Pauline laughed. "How intolerant!" she said; "intolerant even of a simple girl like that."

"Simple, indeed," he said, still pacing. "Who is she, pray?"

"I should tell you nothing," said Pauline; "you had a field for yourself, and one of these Frenchmen you despise so would have shone. However, you confounded her, I think—I suppose she had not seen so wild a being in her life."

"Folly!" he said roughly. "Simple enough, though. Who is she?"

"A married girl. This is her third moon."

"I remember the husband now—a stick, and a conceited stick."

"She is a half school-girl," said Pauline, "full of wonder and admiration for anything wonderful or admirable. One of the true worshipping souls—the rarest kind of that sort of virtù."

He stopped pacing. "I have given up collecting," he said.

"The marriage, I suspect," continued Pauline, opening and shutting a fan, "will not be the happiest. He is fine and vain. His head is turned with conquests. There was a poor girl—No matter."

There was scorn in Mr. Romaine's face. He was intolerant. "I knew he was a stick," he said, "and I took his measure for a prig at the first glance."

"There," said Pauline, laughing, "make her one of your vestals. She is actually made to worship. Don't you see devotion in her eye, poor soft child? There are many weary moments in the day, you know, hard to fill up."

Thus Miss Manuel and Mr. Romaine talked until the lamp was brought in. Then the Bishop of Leighton Buzzard came in, bringing with him his finely-turned ebony legs; and, after the bishop, the pleasant Reviewer; and, after him, the general company. A crowd of faces—many false, many indifferent; but by-and-by appeared among them one *true* one—that of Young Brett.

An officer-child or an officer-boy in that company would have been wholly irrelevant. He would have fallen upon evil days, and have been stoned—that is to say, politely jeered out of the place. But Pauline honoured and even loved that faithful young soldier. "No one must touch my terrier," she said. For him there was always a happy smile. She was glad when she saw his figure. His ready service—his faithful devotion in the old cruel days, now happily far off, were not to be forgotten. Indeed, his true and simple devotion had been made manifest in a hundred kind and useful ways; and, so long as he had stayed at Eastport, he had watched tenderly over that quiet marble slab which rested over poor Violet. When the regiment moved, which it did in about a year, Pauline returning home, discovered that he had privately salaried an assistant in a nursery-garden to look after the weeds, and such little gardening as would be wanting.

But, in that mixed company, his own merits soon exempted

him from any protection. This day he came and was welcomed by Pauline, who had not seen him for a fortnight. He sat down eagerly beside her. "Do you remember your wondering," he said, "what had become of that man at Eastport—that Major Carter?"

Pauline's eyes flashed.

"Yes—yes," she said, hastily; "and have you heard anything of him?"

"I saw him to-day," said Young Brett. "I never liked him, but I went up and spoke to him, and I found out all about him."

"Yes," said Pauline, with great interest; "go on. You are the most useful friend I have."

"Nonsense," said he, colouring under this praise; "you will spoil me. He has been abroad. Some little town in France. He is in mourning, and has lost his wife; in great grief, I suppose."

"Lost his wife! And is he going back to France?" said Pauline, eagerly.

"Dear no!" he said; "has just taken a house; he told me his address; asked about you."

"He *did*?" said Pauline, with compressed lips.

"O yes," said Young Brett; "and soon after we parted at the corner of Pall-Mall. I was going to the club, and he went to the Insurance Company—the Irrefragable, I think."

"Insurance Company!" said Pauline; "why, what for?"

"I don't know," said Young Brett, in a little distress at not having made this out; "but I could ask, you know—find out——"

"No, no," said Pauline; "it is nothing. Thanks. You are always good to me, and useful. Now, hand the bishop his tea."

And to the bishop, whose turned ebony limbs lay over each other like two miniature gymnastic clubs reposing in a corner, he hurried over, eagerly bearing a cup of tea.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-SEVENTH.

THE HOUSE IN CLARGES-STREET.

CAPTAIN FERMOR, having now done with the army, and rather failed in his Indian profession, had been washed ashore on the great London strand. How interminable that

strand is for such waifs; how barren, how miserable, for all such new waifs and strays, has been over and over again proved. Fermor, a young man, and, as men go, not by any means a dull man, met with a few stray inhabitants on this lonely coast, running down from their huts, that is to say, from a club or two: but in London practically he had only a few acquaintances, and scarcely any friends.

He had come home with Sir Hopkins, had passed up through the south of France, and had made that dramatic morning call just as he had promised. He had heard of Violet's death, and had indeed been much affected, but that was long, long before. He was not well off: he stopped with this family rather longer than a mere morning call required, and, before very long, the marriage was settled on, and it was known that "Fermor had picked up an heiress," and also "an old father." There was some truth in the last odd expression, for Mr. Carlay gave his daughter fifty thousand pounds, after this fashion: It was conveyed to trustees for "her use for life," and afterwards to Fermor absolutely.

"I cannot live without my daughter," he said, half piteously. "You might cut me off water, or bread, or meat, or even air. I have lived with her always; I cannot part with her now in my old age. I will make it up to you. You shall see I shall. I know how young married people do. If it was settled on her, you would soon come to think me in the way, and I should have to go. Now I shall have a stake in the house. No, no. I will do everything; you shall see."

Fermor smiled at this foolish eagerness. It was an exceptional arrangement certainly, but after all he was a quiet old man—clay in a fashionable potter's hand—and the consideration was abundant. Thus the house was furnished and made splendid, and thus a little room at the top of the first flight, leading to the drawing-room, where there was a greenhouse, a study, and a bedroom, became Mr. Carlay's home, where he read French and Spanish books. It rolled on very smoothly for some weeks. Then Fermor began to weary a little.

Fermor alone, and Fermor doubled, were two different things in fashionable life. He had hung a millstone of disability about his own neck. Young Mrs. Fermor could not show her passports, or her papers were not "in rule." A pleasant wandering man was always welcome: he filled in gaps in the ranks. But when it was given out that he had married "some low creature," and the knowing him entailed knowing the low creature,

it was perceived that the game was not altogether worth the candle. And thus it was that in crowded London he began to find himself in a sort of elegant desert.

This he did not at all relish. He loved the old incense, the incense which in private drawing-rooms ladies were accustomed to swing before him from little feminine censers. There were none now to swing; rather, the censers were busy before other images. He resented all this bitterly, just as a reduced gentleman resents the loss of luxuries, and came home of evenings to domestic joys, very moody and silent.

He thought very often of the hapless Violet. It seemed to him a very pretty romance, and it became sweet to him to dwell on it. The whole was a soft picture to look back to, and he felt deeply and sorrowfully, as he thought of her sad end. It was a sort of pet flower-garden, into which he retired at times to walk. And he thought very, very often of the splendid flashing sister, and their dramatic night outside the café, and of "the curiously strange impression" he seemed to make upon her. He felt a sort of restless wish to meet her again, and know more of those soft details which almost fell into the shape of a dream. He made many inquiries, but could not find her out. He had no clue. He asked those who might have known, but without success.

Suddenly one evening, on the steps of his club, he met Young Brett, whom he had not seen since an Eastport day, ever so long ago, and the day of an Eastport little party. But those times were now rolled up and huddled away in a corner—like old canvas scenery.

Young Brett coloured up, gave him a blunt nod, and was passing on. Fermor stopped him. He was quick enough to see this feeling, and was amused; Brett was only a child.

"I am so glad, Brett," said Fermor, putting his arm in the boy's. "Come back in here, I want to talk to you."

The other stood irresolute.

"I have to go——" he said at length. "The fact is, Fermor——"

Fermor was, luckily, in a good humour that evening. "The fact is," he said, "you are not so glad to see an old friend as you ought to be. Come. I am going your way, whatever way it is. There."

Young Brett was no match for handling of this sort. "Now," said Fermor, after they had walked a few moments, "what is the matter? What has been done to you? Have I not always

tried to be kind to you—done everything I could in my small way?"

"Oh yes, yes," said Young Brett, a little ashamed; "but—but—Oh, Fermor, how *could* you do that?—it was dreadful. Such misery, such ruin! If indeed it had been to *me*, how glad I should have been! But that poor sweet innocent girl. It killed her, Fermor, it did indeed, as much as if you had poisoned her or stabbed her."

Fermor was silent a moment. Something like shame was in his cheeks. Yet there was something in this honest young creature he could not be angry with. "Brett," he said, in a low voice, "you have been hearing these stories. I was very sorry. I *could* not help it. How was I to know? Even her sister, who is the best judge, whom I saw in Paris the other day, she does not believe that idle history."

"Pauline!" said Young Brett, starting; "you met *her*?"

"To be sure," said Fermor, confidently. "Ask her about it if you like—we had coffee together on the Boulevards. Is she at Eastport still?"

Young Brett—relieved infinitely, and even delighted to find that his friend was in some sort a true man (for so he now found him, from his faith in anything Miss Manuel did)—became eagerly communicative and told all that he knew, and left Fermor with Miss Manuel's address in Alfred-place, and many other particulars.

Fermor came home pleased with himself, and very gay. The nuptial stage moon was still shining, and the new husband and new wife wore their theatrical dresses and properties for each other's sake. But on this day young Mrs. Fermor had come home sadly troubled and distressed. She had two griefs: a deep and intricate deception practised on herself, and the image of a poor soft girl who had withered away unto death.

She had *now* got a little corner or closet of romance into which she retired, and found pleasure in painting up a dreadful picture of desertion, and miserable blight. Not but that this brought with it a sense of conquest for herself; but there was also present a dread sense of *disquiet*. For already had the glorious sun in whose light she basked sent forth some cold chilling rays, which made her shrink away in a sort of alarm.

By another week—she being now left a good deal alone, with a vague curiosity to know more of the bright Miss Manuel, and that curious story in which her husband had played such a part—Fermor came to her about noon, and asked would she

go for him into the City, and do some small commission? He had West-end business of his own to attend to. For, though he had now no known profession, there was a sort of fiction accepted in the house of his going out each day for business, and of his coming home to dinner after business was done. Would she oblige him in this? said Captain Fermor, ceremoniously, for the stage moon was still shining, and the pantomime running. She was a little pleased. It fitted in very nicely, and she set out that afternoon with her maid, in a cab.

She had some commission in some City shop, which was not readily found, and a sort of rude Siberian cabman (with a gaunt angular horse, whose legs swung like a pendulum in a slow trot) had made a low grumbling protest at each fresh direction. When, finally, he was bidden from the heart of the City to make straight for Alfred-place, at Brompton, he began to dwell with savage irony on the advantages of having "a 'os of hiron," and to hint at young Mrs. Fermor's "calling 'erself a lady," which she had not done, though perhaps considering the title implied. Taking a kind of short cut, he got into a network of slums and narrow streets, devoted to ancient smelling fishes, and meat perhaps as old, and, to the general furnishing of a larder, mostly in a state of decay. Where, too, were some old book-stalls and some curiosity shops. And here, while turning a corner, the pendulum limbs of the cab-horse slipped from beneath him, and he was down on the stones—himself as rough and as angular as a heap of stones.

In an instant there was a crowd; a crowd that came from behind the ancient meats and ancient fishes, and out of dark places yet farther behind, just like brigands stopping a diligence. The two women inside, long since in trepidation at these strange regions, were now filled with terror, especially when the Siberian, instead of striving to raise his beast, came straight to the window, and began to assail them publicly as the authors of the misfortune. This was "wot it was come to," he said, still maintaining the irony. He hoped they liked it, and "was proud of their work."

"Let us out! let us out! Do, please," said Mrs. Fermor, as the ring of faces drew closer to listen.

The Siberian put his hands in his pockets. "You want to see it, do ye? Nice ladies, eh! Now," he said, suddenly growing savage, "wot are you going to do? Come?"

"O, this is dreadful!" said Mrs. Fermor. "Help us, do. Do, please, let us out. Here is money."

They had only a few shillings. At the other side, where the glass was up, raw unshaved faces were pressed against it, looking in. There was much merriment and great curiosity abroad as to the result of this pleasant scene.

"Do you suppose," the other added, with a loud bang on the door that made the whole cab clatter—"do you suppose that you're to go about all day a killin' 'orses on honest men, with a drive here, and a drive there, and then not pay for your game? I tell you wot——"

"We are ladies; indeed we are. Here is our address, and Captain Fermor——"

The Siberian laughed. "I want no captings, I wants my money, and I wants my 'orse. And I tell you, you don't go till I gets one or the other. Ain't it a shame," he added, turning to the crowd, "for people as dresses as ladies, and——"

In utter despair, young Mrs. Fermor had been looking across the wild faces, and beyond the wild faces. Suddenly she saw a tall gentleman—a European, as it were, among the Indians—picking his way round the outskirts of the crowd. In an instant she had called to him. "O, sir, sir! Do come here! Help us! do, please."

The tall gentleman stopped a second, listened, then shrugged his shoulders, and was passing on, as if it was a mistake. That stopping showed Mrs. Fermor his face—the "gauntly handsome" face—and the trailing moustache.

"O, Mr. Romaine," she said in a lower voice.

Then slowly Mr. Romaine swung his way through them. The crowd was knocked aside heavily, as though his elbows had been the corners of massive furniture. He was at the window in a moment, confronting the Siberian, on whom he looked down a head taller.

Young Mrs. Fermor, in some confusion, was beginning her story, when he stopped her. "Afterwards, if you like," he said. (Cab, cabman, and horse, in fact, narrated the whole thing much more shortly.) "Now you had better get out." He took hold of the handle of the door.

"Come, now. I say——" said the Siberian.

Mr. Romaine let it go at once. "Well, open it yourself," said he. "It will save my gloves. And look sharp."

The other was a little staggered. "And who's to pay for the 'os and the damage? This won't do, I say," he said, coming in front of the door.

"Stand back, please," said Mr. Romaine, gently, at the same

time calmly pressing his iron elbow on him. It was like the corner of a chest of drawers. "There—thank you! That will do. You should keep these handles a little freer. Take care," he said, in a low warning voice, to him. "You will get into mischief by interfering with me. Stand away! I once killed an Indian with a blow of this fist. I did; upon my word. There's my card: I have got *yours*. I shall recollect the number. Here, my friend" (to a smart ostler-looking man), "get this horse on his legs again. He is only shaken. There" (and he put something into the ostler's hands). "And you help too" (to a parcels boy, whose hand he also visited). "Here" (to the Siberian), "go to the next public with that. Wine makes the heart of man glad—or gin. Now, take my arm. I know a short cut out of this place." He led her away without further protest or obstruction. He was indeed a hero—a quiet, calm, grand hero. With so slight an exertion of power, what might he not accomplish if the occasion required? Women always overflow with gratitude to preservers of this sort—even to those who have saved them from a driver. Civilised Europe was only a street away after all. Better still, here was a stand of cabs. Then Mrs. Fermor recovered herself, and began to discourse incoherent gratitude.

"Good gracious!" said he, "it is nothing. I heard a lady calling from a cab-window, and I came. Do what we will, we can't make a romance out of it. Now, here is a cab. I suppose I can do no more for you now?"

"Oh, thank you!" said Mrs. Fermor, still overflowing with gratitude. "I don't know what to say, I am sure; how to thank you for such a service, knowing you so little, too."

"As for that," said he, "I may, without rudeness, relieve your mind. If it had been a washerwoman in her cart, whom I had never seen in my life, I should have done the same. It is really nothing," he said, smiling. "You make too much of it. Here is a cab. Could you spare me now? I really have an appointment."

"Oh, I am sure," said young Mrs. Fermor, "if we could leave you anywhere, I am sure——"

"I assure you I like to walk, unless," he added, smiling a little contemptuously, "you still think yourself in danger. I assure you this driver looks moral and respectable. Don't be afraid."

A little mortified, she got in, and she saw Mr. Romaine hurry

away, apparently glad to be free. The maid pronounced him "a short" gentleman—that is, as regards manner.

Fermor was a long time out, and came home late—with the drum hoisted, as it were. She was not skilled in reading those meteorological signals, and flew at him eagerly with a full narrative of her adventures. It was *such* an escape—such a rescue—and such a rescuer. But Fermor was chafing. He had called twice at a House, and had not been admitted, though he had seen a bishop's carriage drive up, and finely turned ebony limbs go down its steps, and up other steps into the House. It was an insult, and not a mistake.

Mrs. Fermor's eyes were sparkling as she dwelt on the details of her story. "And would you believe it, Charles, he no more seemed to mind what he had done, than if he had walked across this room."

"Well, I take it all for granted," said her husband, getting up suddenly. "And I have heard it three times over now. A cab horse fell down, and a gentleman called another cab for you."

Young Mrs. Fermor coloured.

A cold fog or Scotch mist had covered up the stage moon. Now she saw the drum hoisted—and, wounded, withdrew her little narrative.

"Can he be getting *tired* of me already," she thought, a little bitterly. "How cold and cruel he can be!" She had a dismal evening before her. The personal worship, the little censers that swung delicate little compliments, and the pretty sweet-smelling vapours of Roger le Garçon, had been tumbled away into a corner. They were tarnished; they were old plate now.

A note was brought in. She took it, wondering who was to write her notes. She turned to the signature, and found it signed "*Pauline Manuel.*" As Pauline's face flashed and glittered, so there was something of the same light in these written words, something in the invitation they gave. She had been expecting her, she said. She wished to see her so much, to talk over a hundred matters. "I am alone," said Pauline, "and have a hundred other things I want to keep out of my thoughts. You owe me a debt—you should be generous. *Your husband kindly called twice to-day*, but half by mistake, half out of intention, was not admitted. I can know *you*, even like you—but him not so much; at least, not for a long time. You will understand this. Come to me to-morrow."

Colour flushed her cheeks. "So *this* is what he is busy with,"

she said; "carrying on a plot, a mystery. Oh, I am very miserable, very unhappy!"

Fermor came in precisely at this unlucky moment. He saw her tell-tale cheeks. He was intolerant, and did not relish any one being out of humour but himself. "What," he said, "not blown over yet? Is it possible that you are displeased because I did not enter into your cab adventure? Good gracious! Come, now, you really must not be so unreasonable." There was an air of sarcastic good humour in his tone, which was a little disagreeable.

Young Mrs. Fermor looked at him tremblingly. Her round red lips were quivering. She was thinking of all her "wrongs" accumulating since the Paris night. But she answered calmly: "You might reduce every action to that shape, if we looked at it in that sort of light."

Fermor did not like being argued with, so he said, sharply, "And let me tell you, my dear child, now that you are come to live in London, that this making a nine days' wonder out of every cab you take, and of every man you pick up out of the street, will lead you into all sorts of embarrassments. Seriously, we should get rid of our little Eastport simplicity, my dear."

Her lips shaped themselves into deep reproach. "How cold, how unkind you are!" they seemed to say. Fermor heard these words as much as if they had been spoken. "Well, you can go to your father," he said, "and tell *him* about the cab. I have business now—letters. I have been worried all day. The story will amuse him."

Young Mrs. Fermor, with her round soft cheeks full of colour, was sensitive, and a little quick of temper. The soft cheeks were glowing and flaming. "I did not expect this from you," she said, quickly. "If papa knew this——"

Now indeed the colour came to Fermor's cheeks. "Don't say that," he answered, with a trembling voice; "never speak in that way to me, if you wish us to live quietly together. I shall not be intimidated by *his* name. No, I am not come to *that*; no," continued he, walking up and down, "though people may say I have sold myself 'into genteel slavery.'"

Now was the fitting time for opening the hysterical flood-gates. Down burst the torrent of tears, carrying with it, like stones, ejaculations of cruelty and unkindness. "Ah! I might have expected this," she said. "I was warned in time. And when *she*, poor thing, was treated in *that way*——"

"She! Who?" said Fermor, stopping short in his walk, and turning pale.

"I know it," said young Mrs. Fermor. "I know it all. It was kept very secret; but I have heard it all. Perhaps it will be *my* fate one of these days. God help me! It was not suitable that I should know it. I was kept in the dark, it seems—un—until—until the slavery—yes, the slavery was accomplished. Yes, I know the whole, though you had *reasons* for not telling me—what the poor girl, now in her grave, *who, I was told, was married and happy*—"

"Never, never!" said Fermor, eagerly. "I did not indeed—I could not tell such a falsehood. *You* said so." And indeed, to do him justice, he had never said so. "But this is amiable of you! How kind, how generous! Pray do not let us have any vulgar matrimonial quarrels—not *as yet*, at least," he added, with a forced smile. He tried thus to sweep away the subject into a corner. But, unhappily—to use the odious language of the ring—here was first blood. Very soon the pantomime, with its stage moon, would be withdrawn. The "run" was nearly over. It was of course patched up; both shrank a little from this "vulgar quarrelling." They had not yet learned to cast down the idols, or, at least, to be careless about casting them down.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-EIGHTH.

AT A BROUGHAM WINDOW.

THE Irrefragable Insurance Company, Limited, had a new home in the West-end, a very narrow strip of front, that looked like the "console" of a mahogany sideboard, or like the edge of a thin slice of bride-cake. The small patch of ground upon which it stood would not have furnished room—by way of burial—for many of the "Lives" the office insured; yet, if it had been floored with golden sovereigns instead of encaustic tiles, it would not have represented all it cost. It was doing a thriving business, chiefly from an unquestioned readiness in accepting anything that came loosely under the designation of a Life (even though the value lay rather in the direction of a Death), and from a profession, not quite so unquestioned, of paying all claims with a readiness that was almost "soft."

In these days a brougham drove up to the door of the Irre-fragable—a brougham, no doubt, containing a Life. The Life was a Lady Life. It came in, and the mahogany doors swung to behind it—as it were the lid of a box, shutting down firmly on the Life. The Lady Life was a flashing Life, bright, dazzling, and handsomely dressed. The faces of many clerks converged to her with admiration. Mr. Speedy, manager and actuary, imprisoned all day in a little compartment that looked like a mahogany match-box, looked out over the edge. Mr. Speedy, who did showy calculations, and furnished the instructive stories out of The Books of the Company, beginning pleasantly, “A has insured in the year 1837 for one hundred pounds,” reconnoitred the lady narrowly, for about every Life that entered he did a little exercise to keep his mental hand in. “I know,” said Mr. Speedy to himself; “handsome young wife, old husband, with Life utterly uninsurable. *That won't do here, madam.*” He listened, as Pauline's soft clear voice travelled to him readily. She wished to insure her own Life, only for a trifle, say two hundred pounds—say in favour of her brother. Could they oblige her with forms? Mr. Speedy, over the edge of the match-box, had seen the dark brougham—the spectre of the uninsurable octogenarian husband had happily faded out. Here was a case for extended connexion. He came down softly out of his box with forms, and took the case out of the hands of the inferiors.

“You will find everything here,” he said, collecting quite a little library of fat almanacks, coloured pictures of the “branches” at Montreal, Dublin, &c. “We offer very advantageous terms. We ask no disagreeable questions, and give as little trouble as we can. I am sure you would not repent coming to us. In fact, if you were satisfied, and would kindly mention us to any of your friends——”

“I certainly shall,” said Pauline. “In fact, I have come to you chiefly because a gentleman that I used to know, has been with you—Major Carter.”

Mr. Speedy's brow contracted. “Ah! A claim *that* is! The most unfortunate transaction we have had yet. Seven thousand pounds, and only two years' premium paid! We were advised to resist; but, as we are a young institution, we thought it better to avoid the scandal,” said Mr. Speedy, smiling. “It was the fault of our medical adviser who accepted the lady's Life too hastily.”

“Mrs. Carter,” said Pauline; “so I heard.”

"Yes," said Mr. Speedy. "But we are prepared cheerfully to make any sacrifice—*any* sacrifice to keep up the irrefragable character of our corporation. As we have dealt with Major Carter openly, fairly, and honourably, so, if you honour us, madam——"

"You will pay my heirs," said Pauline, smiling, "as readily as you did Major Carter?"

"The board has not paid yet," said Mr. Speedy. "By the terms of our charter, we can keep the policy money nine months. But what is that, after all? Fairness and honesty before everything."

Pauline took away her pictures and thick almanacks into her brougham. Mr. Speedy retired into his box, but looked out long over its edge after the bright and fashionable lady who had visited him. He told Mrs. Speedy at dinner of the interview he had had with a very "high" person, indeed, at the office, and he hinted that by his tact and management he had secured that "interest" for the office. He did not know, however, that the "high" lady had thrown herself back in her brougham with a weary air, and had flung down his papers with a sort of disgust. "How I loathe—how I detest myself," she said, "for these meannesses! I am ashamed to hold up my head. But what can I do? Women have no other strength. Trickery and cunning and meanness—this must serve us in the room of brute force. Is my life to become an organised hypocrisy? O Violet, Violet! not for you!"

She was coming to the park. Her face became bright again. She drew herself forward, and looked out proudly from the window. A few people were waiting half way at the crossing to let a string of carriages go by. To her astonishment, she saw young Mrs. Fermor and her maid among them. In an instant she had the glass down, and was calling to her.

The young wife, unhappy and tossed about by her new bitter troubles, had determined to forswear her society. She shrank even from the name. But now, with Pauline present, it seemed altogether different. She felt herself a mere child before that brilliant woman of the world. There was an influence in her—an absorbing glance—which she could not resist. Miss Manuel bade her send home her maid, and get in. She must come and drive with her, and see the company in the park. Mrs. Fermor made a faint protest, and put forward her dress, but she was powerless in *those* hands. There was a seduction about Pauline as she made a place for her beside herself, which, for the moment, she did not wish to resist.

She had never yet seen this shape of Vanity Fair—the procession of people of quality moving along like a bright Coventry ribbon. Her lord, Fermor, had always dismissed it as childish, and as a childish taste. Had not *he* seen it over and over again, until he was literally sick of the business? Now it quite dazzled her—the noble horses, and the knights, and the ladies of the knights, and the wealth that shone with a rawness and vulgarity, and the nobility of birth that glowed with a rich but subdued quietude. She was delighted with this wonderful show, for she was a rustic.

Even the loungers—who came to stare and perhaps remained to talk—attracted her. She asked about them—about everybody. Pauline was charming—told her all things. “I like you to ask me everything,” she said, “in that natural way. I want you to consult me, and in time to like me, if you *can*.”

“Ah!” said young Mrs. Fermor, stooping forward a little eagerly, and in some confusion, “is not that—yes, I am sure it is——”

“How well you know!” said Pauline, looking at her with a strange quick look. “You are quite right. We shall call him over. Mr. Romaine!”

“No, no! indeed no,” said Mrs. Fermor, hurriedly; “not while I am with you.”

“Nonsense!” said Pauline, smiling. “I know what you are thinking of. Are you afraid of him?”

Mr. Romaine, in pale gloves, was at her window. Mrs. Fermor saw the look of impatience on his face as she came into view. “I am always to be in his way,” she thought. “He will be rough to me.” He nodded slightly to her.

“So *you* come to the show,” he said, “Miss Manuel. Of course you do. And yet I know what you think of the whole business. I am astonished—you that talk so.”

“Never mind that now,” she said. “You see my friend Mrs. Fermor here?”

“I do,” he said, looking down to beat his feet with his cane; “that is, I should say I have that pleasure.”

“Mr. Romaine was so kind to me the other day,” said Mrs. Fermor, warmly. “And I am afraid I never thanked him sufficiently for——”

“Oh, I declare,” said he, “are we never to be out of that cab! Heaven preserve us! do let us leave it where we left it. I declare—and think me candid, but not rude, please—I am inclined never to go to the assistance of any one in that way again.”

Pauline looked from one to the other. Mrs. Fermor showed her confusion and mortification. "Because you," she said, quickly and warmly, "are above all these forms, there is no reason why *we* should be. I assure you it is more from respect to ourselves that we say these things. I should consider myself quite rustic if I passed it over. You must make allowance; you should indeed."

This was all spoken very hastily, and with a voice that almost trembled. She was a little quick of temper. He looked at her with really blank astonishment. Pauline clapped her hands.

"Exceedingly good," she said. "There, that will do for you," and she pressed Mrs. Fermor's arm under her shawl with encouragement. "Charming, my dear," she whispered; "a good lesson. Now, Mr. Romaine, after that, tell us news, wicked news, if you have any. There's old Lady Canonbury rolling by and swinging like Mahomet's coffin. Look, dear; and she is worth looking at, for that spotted and fiery face can be set off with a hundred thousand pounds' worth of diamonds."

But Mrs. Fermor's face was glowing and flushing still, and she was biting her plum-coloured lips with vexation, at the sharp attack of which she had been the subject. These pretty little emotions were as yet a sort of awkward squad, to be trained and drilled into good soldiers by-and-by.

"What about Miss Löreley's match?" cried Pauline. "Come, we wait? Begin."

"Look at *her*," he said, suddenly, "how angry she is! She could grill me now—make a pincushion of me—all because I won't be overloaded with thanks. How good!" His eyes were fixed upon her as if she was some show or exhibition. Mrs. Fermor only flushed the more.

"No, indeed," she said, "I don't care in the least. You quite mistake. But I think you need not have been so excited about my little thanks."

"Excited!" he said, smiling. "Who here is excited? I am not. I only speak for myself."

"It's *not* about that, then," said Mrs. Fermor.

"What isn't about that, then? I protest I don't follow."

Still, really angry, she would not answer, but looked out of the window.

"I will not have this," said Pauline. "You must go away; you are creating a disturbance. The savage is breaking out. If you really want a battle, you may have it in my house, with

decency, at the usual hour. There, go," and she drew up the glass and bade the coachman drive home.

"Oh," said Mrs. Fermor, suddenly, "I don't know what you will think of me. I am ashamed of myself, and of such temper."

Miss Manuel laughed. "It was capital," she said. "You have done him a world of good. I, who am not in *much* terror of him, could not have said it. Ah! I see you are clever."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Fermor. "Charles often tells me I am a child still."

At that name Miss Manuel started a little. "Some men would have us children always. Our poor Violet would have been a child always. Sometimes, looking at you as I do now, it reminds me of her—something in the tone, something in the manner. Ah, poor, poor Violet!"

Mrs. Fermor saw the deep eyes glistening. She was quick and impulsive in all emotions. She put her hand affectionately on Miss Manuel's arm.

"Indeed, I feel for you," she said, "and all about *that*. Indeed I do. Now that I know it, it makes me miserable to think of it. Though I had never seen her, I felt as if it had been for my *own* sister. And for *you*, too," she added, "who loved her so dearly."

Pauline drew away from her suddenly with a startled look, and began to talk rapidly. "We need not talk of it *now*. As for loving me, no one will find profit in *that*. Yes, I know," she said; "quite a sad story. A sensation incident they would call it," she added, with a smile, but a very mournful smile.

They were at Alfred-place, and had the unfailing tea. "We shall have a quiet talk together," said Miss Manuel; "you on that sofa, I on this. The mob won't be here for an hour to come. This will be delightful. Talking of poor Romaine, there is really something to be said for him now. He is scarcely an accountable being. You would hardly guess that he is in a very wild state of mind."

Mrs. Fermor looked curious.

"Yes," said Pauline, "I could tell you a long history about *that*. There was a girl he fancied, and who, he tells me, fancied him. As you know, that is good authority; but no matter. These rough savages, as you can fancy, when they *do* love, love like a hurricane—like a storm. Well, she has just married—a good match, too."

Really interested, and not without a little compunction, Mrs. Fermor waited for more. Women delight in these little dramas.

"So, after all," said Miss Manuel, "we should not be very hard on him. You can understand what a struggle is going on. He wants to be good, and to do the right thing, and we should help him if we can. He thinks the newly married pair are to be away for the winter, in Rome; but the worst is, I know that they are to be here. Their plans have been changed. So I say we must help him, and be indulgent. Don't you think so?"

At this moment, the tall figure which they were to help came swinging in. "I knew we should have you presently," said Miss Manuel, half scornfully. "You may sit down, however."

Mr. Romaine dropped instinctively into his low chair. "I told you I was coming," he said. "When I get into the habit of a thing, I must go on, even if I am not in the humour. So I had to come."

"Polite always," said Miss Manuel. "Tea?"

"No," he answered, bluntly; "I don't care for that. Once a sharp thing has been said to me," he said, fixing his eyes directly on Mrs. Fermor, "it puts me out for everything."

Mrs. Fermor coloured at this allusion, which she understood perfectly.

"I never meant, I am sure," said she, casting down her eyes. "I thought you——"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Romaine, as if he was in the hunting-field. "There's human nature! We apply everything to ourselves. Alas! that we should always be the first objects in our own thoughts."

Another sort of colour was hurrying to Mrs. Fermor's cheeks at this fresh outrage, when he added, slowly,—

"Not but that, in the present case, you were right. I *was* alluding to you."

Again, in fresh confusion, Mrs. Fermor, vexed with him, with the situation, with everybody, but mostly with herself, hurriedly rose to go. He lifted himself hastily.

"Going home?" he said, "thinking me, of course, a perfect savage. Well, I can't help it; I can't change my spots. But I can do this—beg pardon. Forgive. I don't mean all I say or do."

Mrs. Fermor looked up at him with more confidence, and a smile. She was hopelessly mortified at these ups and downs, but gave him her hand. Pauline came out with her, and kissed her. "You are a wonderful creature," she said; "you amaze me. I could not *dare* to go on in that way. I must see you again soon. You have promised me, mind."

As the young wife passed out, Miss Manuel, staying on the stairs, and looking after her, dropped her hand on the banister, and stamped her foot with what seemed a sudden pain. "Poor innocent!" said she, "is she beginning to like me? How like to——" Then she turned sharply round, and walked back into the drawing-room.

"There!" she said, half contemptuously, "you have found a sensible woman at last, on whom all your fine tragedy is thrown away. Now, is your mind at rest? What can repay you for the lost time?"

He began to pace the room, impatiently biting his moustache. He looked at her angrily. "I see. Take care. So she defies me through you? Take care. That is not to be done to me."

"But she does all the same," said Pauline, with a laugh.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-NINTH.

A HOLLOW WORLD.

CAPTAIN FERMOR, very restless—destitute, as it were, of that pleasant romance which used to be his daily food—was in a state of impatient hostility with the world in which he lived. On this very day he had determined to go and spend a pleasant tranquil afternoon with Miss Manuel, and thus work the current clear. One of the *old* pleasant conversations—a conversation, that is, where *he* talked, and brought out the fine Arabian *როჲო*, now, alas! too long in stable.

That wild notion of her not denying him, which presented itself to him as he walked, must have been a mistake or misconception. Perhaps she felt there was some of the *old* danger in these retired interviews, and was wary in exposing herself to risk. At this notion he smiled, and patted the Arabian's neck with fondness. He was smiling as he was just turning into Alfred-place. He saw the balcony, and the flowers in the balcony; but he suddenly saw under the balcony a lady coming out on the steps. The lady wore a dress and a bonnet which he thought he knew; and looking closer, he recognised young Mrs. Fermor, his wife.

He was thunderstruck—speechless. This, then, was it. Ah! *this* explained it all. *Here* was the interference that had closed

the door against him. With bitterness on his lips he turned away full of anger, and with a, "Upon my word, it has come to a pretty pass!"

He thought first of hurrying after her and convicting her in her "spy system" at once. But this seemed imprudent: he could not trust himself in the street. How was he to pay his visit? He was "upset"—not "in the tone" to be smiling and fluent. It was always to be the way. Besides, he thought bitterly, the door was effectually closed *now*. And he chose it should be closed.

He walked away very fast, came through the Park, where the gay ribbons were still winding round, and the gaudy flags of fashion still flying. "All *here* should be *my* friends," he said; "and *my* true sphere—until I lost it through my own folly!" And he stood at the rail, and saw the thousand-and-one little boudoirs on wheels pass him, now stopping, now going on. He knew everybody—by sight at least. The men perched high, driving spirited horses, and the young girls in the tiny boudoirs. Suddenly he started.

"I declare," he thought. "Old friends! I am so glad." And he was at the window of a little chamber in a moment.

These were some "Craven people," a mother and daughters, who lived in the purest fashionable air. Sojourned permanently in ball-rooms, and occasionally went out to their own home. To him they were always kind. He had leave to come in when he pleased, and at every dinner they gave, dined, as of course. They allowed him to do a hundred things *for* them—the best proof of fashionable intimacy and affection. Fermor's eyes lighted with complacent delight as he drew near to the window. He was thinking what a surprise *for them*.

At the same moment a tall gaunt man was raising his hat and approaching the window. There were three smiles of welcome, and three "O! Mr. Romaine's."

Fermor, a little disordered, said: "O, Mrs. Craven! So glad, I am sure——"

The three faces looked at him. One, a younger and simpler face—she showed no scars as yet—said, softly—

"Mamma, Mr. Fermor! You know——"

"Ah, to be sure. How-de-do, Mr. Fermor? So long, you know——"

"O, Mr. Romaine! we have been *dying* to see you. Why didn't you come on Tuesday?"

The elder girl, who was her mother's sergeant, said—

"Ah, you didn't care, Mr. Romaine. I know I never missed you."

FERMOR (forcing a hearing and recognition). I am so glad, Mrs. Craven. I am sure I have been (this spoken a little sadly) all over the world since I saw you.

Mrs. CRAVEN (with no curiosity). Indeed? Oh, of course. But, Mr. Romaine, I assure you, my girls——

FERMOR (with an aigre ruefulness). It is so curious meeting in this way——

THE SERGEANT. You *won't* tell us, Mr. Romaine? No? I said so to mamma. No, you won't.

MR. ROMAINE (gently pressing on Fermor to the window). I beg your pardon—*would* you be so kind? Thanks! (Fermor was now behind, with only a glimpse of the boudoir, over a steep hill formed by Mr. Romaine's back.)

YOUNGEST MISS CRAVEN (with a little pity for Fermor; but her voice does not reach over the hill). Have you been quite well, Mr. Fermor?

FERMOR (glowing, raging, biting his lip, and not knowing what to do). Good morning, Mrs. Craven.

Three eager smiles are shaken at him like three white handkerchiefs, and he gets off the stage somehow. Looking back, he sees Mr. Romaine bent, as he leant on the carriage window, looking after him with a grim smile. If he had been near, he would have heard Mrs. Craven say, in answer——

"Oh, only one of the girls' friends. Now, I am told he has picked up some curious creature, and thinks it is to be all the same. So ludicrous, and so ignorant, and really so disagreeable both for him, and for us!"

"Quite understand," said Mr. Romaine. "There *are* fellows who never take a hint, you know."

That was a gloomy walk home of Fermor's. "Heartless set," he said. "They *might* have recollected all I have done for them, and all the money they have cost me! I suppose they think nothing more is to be got now that I have"—and he laughed—"done for myself. *They* are no loss, at any rate."

Suddenly he thought of his relation, Sir Hopkins, whom he knew was in Town, but whom he had never yet found time to go and see. Someway he had rather shrank a little from the meeting, for he had not consulted him about this marriage. But then he had been treated badly by Sir Hopkins. He was in. It was close on six o'clock, and Sir Hopkins was writing. He was still boring into the old diplomatic molehills—still burrowing,

tunnelling, indefatigably. Only now, as he grew older, the molehills grew shallower and meaner, and the tunnels narrower. The awful whisper had even been heard in "F. O." corridors that "Old Pocock's day" was "gone by," and the young clerks used the word "fogie." With reference to his last experiment, it was said plainly and firmly, "You know he broke down. Lord St. Ryden insisted, and they *had* to give it to him. He was in one of his mulish fits—though they were putting him off—and so fixed on this. They were precious sorry for it afterwards, though. Never was there such a mess as he left."

When Fermor came in, he was in a molehill, tunnelling away. Letters to one, letters to the other; to lords, to no lords; to official, to non-official. Was there a little pin, resting on a lever, which lay on another lever, which was one of a thousand other little levers, to move the great machine—he sent a letter to that pin. Was there a thread hanging down among a cloud of threads—was there a loose wire among a million of loose wires—was there a fly upon the great wheel—he addressed dismal letters to that thread, to that wire, and to that fly. He was still intriguing, miserably, wearily, for office, as he had intrigued forty years before,—that is, calling letters intrigues.

He looked up as Fermor entered, and looked down. His pen was in the middle of a sentence. "Sit down," he said; "excuse me." He wrote on for a minute or two, then stopped.

"Glad to see you," he said, coldly. "How have you been? Now what is it? What do you want me to do? I have not much interest *now*, you know."

"I merely came to see you, sir," said Fermor.

"Oh, *that* was it," said the diplomatist, beginning to write again. "I have not been so well, lately. To tell you the truth," he added, abruptly, "I am very busy, as you see, and——"

"Oh, certainly," said Fermor, rising, with a wounded air; "you need not stand on ceremony with me, sir."

Sir Hopkins looked at him a moment. "So you married, it seems. I dare say you begin to find a change."

Fermor said, "How, sir?" a little doubtfully.

"Why, the life, the attention, the consideration. *I* know how soon *that* comes, unless you can dazzle them with what you have done."

"I don't want to dazzle anybody," said Fermor, in some confusion.

"No; that was pretty plain," said the other. "No fear of

that. 'Pon my soul, Charles, I had hoped better things of you; I had indeed. In plain words, you threw yourself away—you did. We would have made a man of you, if you had let us, and by-and-by, when I am in again——"

"Why, God bless me," said Fermor, with great warmth, "did you not advise me yourself? Did you not keep saying to me at Eastport, 'There was a match?' Surely you remember? Let us be candid."

Sir Hopkins shook his head. "I am sorry to see all this," he said. "You are only a novice, after all. Why, couldn't you see that was all my little foreign office business—setting up one girl to bring down the other?"

"And you *did* bring her down," said Fermor, bitterly, "with a vengeance. I believe it had been better for me, after all, if I had cast my lot with one who loved me, and who, I believe, died for me, instead of being made the object of foreign office business, as you say." This was, perhaps, the most genuine speech Fermor made in his life.

"That was all a matter for your own choice," said Sir Hopkins, calmly. "But, to tell you the truth, I don't quite follow all this. On this occasion, I think it right to tell you plainly, Charles, to prevent misconception hereafter"—and Sir Hopkins paused a little, and looked at him meaningly—"that I am not—er—altogether pleased. You have taken your course, and disappointed me; made what I can only call a low marriage, without *any* connexion or rank. I don't like the transaction, and I say so. When I was next in office, I should have been glad—but that is too late. You understand?"

"Well," said Fermor, with a wounded defiance, "I want nothing. It can't be helped. I am sorry for it."

"I don't care telling you now that it has been a disappointment, and a great one to me. I don't choose to be disappointed. I don't mind telling you now, that I had a girl for you, ready and waiting—a girl out of our office. Such a connexion! Why were you so sudden about it? It took my breath away when I heard it, and brought back that old pain under the shoulder-blade. Good God! What a fool you made of yourself! Good-by, Charles. I am fearfully busy. And I am afraid I shall be very busy for the next few weeks."

Fermor came home, straight to his home, his cheeks tingling. "This is what I have brought myself to," he said, with utter bitterness and ruefulness. He was dreadfully mortified and wounded. He beat the rails impatiently with his cane as he

passed by. Coming to his house, he went sadly into the drawing-room, where was young Mrs. Fermor waiting.

"Dinner must be spoiled," she said, ringing the bell. "Three-quarters of an hour!"

He flung himself on a sofa. "What does it matter?" he said. "I am late for everything now. It is a wonder you waited for me."

She looked at him astonished.

"Yes," he went on, "why should any one take the trouble? I am not worth it. Everybody can treat me as they please, it would seem. Good heavens!" and he started up, "it seems like a conspiracy to mortify and humiliate me."

The young wife went up close to him, full of sympathy. "Dear Charles," she said, "tell me about your troubles. Indeed I feel for you. What is it? Who has hurt you?"

"What can *you* do? Such treatment!" he went on, angrily. "Mrs. Craven, Sir Hopkins, and the rest of them! As if there was some mark on me. What do you suppose my crime is? Throwing myself away, as they call it; making a low marriage—*that's* the phrase."

Deeply hurt, and with deep reproach, she said, "Oh, Charles, you *cannot* mean this?"

"I don't mean it," he said; "pray don't assume that: but they all tell me so. The world is right, it seems. Else, why do they mortify and insult me at every turn, as if I had done a crime? It is not your fault. I should, of course, be a monster to say so. But no man has paid so heavily as I have done for any act of his life. There's Sir Hopkins, too, has hinted plainly he means to punish me, because he doesn't approve. The women in the Park will hardly deign to speak to me. Is not this pleasant? Delightful sauce to flavour one's dinner with!"

At this moment entered the stiff, grim father, who, in this new shape of life, rarely seen, and emerging for meals from his secluded quarter on the stairs, was as grim, as rigid, and metallic as of old. The old casting was sharp and hard as ever. He stood in the doorway a moment; then, without a word, turned and went down. The others followed. It was a silent and solemn meal. A blank had fallen on them all. Fermor cut his food savagely and defiantly. At the end—Mr. Carlay never sat over wine, but was absorbed silently into his quarter—if Fermor was out, he came and read to his daughter. Now, at the end of dinner, when she was gone up to a dismal meditation by the fire, and Fermor was thinking of a lonely night walk, just as

dismal, the cast-iron figure said: "Would you wait a moment, I want to speak to you."

A little surprised, the other came back.

"Take your seat again," said Mr. Carlay. "I wish to say a few words to you seriously. It will quite save a good many more serious words, later."

Fermor did not like this magisterial tone, and perhaps, on another occasion, would have said something about this "solemn preface."

"Mary is not looking well," Mr. Carlay went on. "She is growing unhappy. I have remarked it for some time." He paused a second or two. "Are you as kind to her as you should be?"

Fermor started. "I should hope so," he answered. "Why should you ask me such a question?"

"I will tell you," said the other. "Because I begin to think you are not kind. People suppose because I live out of the world—as it were out of the house—that I see nothing, and know nothing. Never was there a greater mistake, if that be the impression that directs any particular course of conduct. I see everything, and know everything."

Often and often had Fermor laid it down at mess, and at other places where he, as it were, sat judicially, that anything like lectureship from a person in the relation that Mr. Carlay was to him, would be fatal. From the outset he had settled that such encroachment was to be resisted at once. He thought of this now.

"Whatever there is to see and know, you are welcome to," he said, calmly. "Perhaps, if you did mix a little more in human concerns, you would have truer views of things. I hope I behave as well as most husbands do. I know my duty, *whatever complaints* may have been made to you," he added, with some meaning.

Mr. Carlay was growing more grim, and dense, and hard, every moment. His lips scarcely seemed to move as the words passed from them. "Look here," he said, "I do not want to interfere with you: hitherto I have not done so. If you only hint it, you shall see even less of me than you have done. Those rooms up-stairs—and—my daughter—make up my world. But I tell you this now—and I tell it to you solemnly—if I find the slightest change towards *her*"—here he stood up and seemed to grow in gaunt height into a stark prophet—"if she is not treated gently, tenderly, softly, even childishly—if she is not

humoured and petted, and made the queen and darling of this house, as she has always been of mine, I declare there will come a change over me that you cannot dream of. You don't know me. You don't know what I can be, or what I have been. But I warn you now in time. Touch her, and you touch me. I am willing to be tranquil for this life, and go out of life peacefully, after all the storms I have passed through. But one other sign of what I have seen this evening, and I become what I would not become. You are no match for me. Come now," he said, suddenly changing his tone, "you have sense and tact, and will take this in good part. But, believe me, nothing ~~was~~ ever meant so much in earnest, or will so surely come to pass."

He left Fermor speechless, and really overpowered by this denunciation. The gaunt figure seemed to grow as it spoke. Its eyes flashed, and there was an air of undefined menace. Fermor knew not what to say or to reply, but felt his strange influence, and shrank away from collision with this wild being, whom he now saw in a new light. But he went forth upon the night in a storm of humiliation and passion, scarcely knowing what he was doing. He thought not so much of the degrading intimidation which had been tried on him that night, as of the unworthy complaint that must have been made by Mrs. Fermor—which he should register and never forgive. If the world was in a conspiracy against him, he had strength enough to do battle with it. But for *her*—she who had dared to behave in *that* way—he could not bring himself to think of it. With that violent and dangerous Carlay it would not do to quarrel openly, but to her he could mark it in a cold, cutting, quiet way that she should *feel*. So, when he came home that night again, there was upon him a new, formal, chill sort of manner, a kind of icicle politeness, under whose touch she seemed to wither away. She had an instinct what it came from, and with timidity tried to make some excuse or extenuation, but shrank away from his cold look of wonder and colder disclaimer. On this night a domestic Nemesis seemed to have entered into the house, and from this night it was steadily busy at its work.

CHAPTER THE FIFTIETH.

CONSTRUCTING A WEB.

IN a day or two Miss Manuel's brougham was standing at the door of the "Irrefragable," and Miss Manuel herself inside, reflected in the highly-polished official mahogany.

Mr. Speedy had come specially from his box with yet more "irrefragable" literature, for the bright lady seemed to be an eager student of the little tables, and could not have enough of the imaginary A who had insured for one hundred pounds at the age of twenty-one years, and who in a surprising short time had come in for "bonuses," and other good things, to the amount of five or six times his policy. Not without interest, too, were the "fatal warnings" against improvidence. Miss Manuel still could not make up her mind.

"We should be delighted at any time," said Mr. Speedy, "at any time, to purchase up the policy at its full value."

"I know," said Miss Manuel, leaning on her round hand. "That would be charming. If poor Mrs. Carter could have done that," she added, smiling.

Mr. Speedy's brow contracted; he only liked dwelling on the bright side of the company's affairs. "We don't accept Major Carter's," he said, "as a pattern case. If we did, we might close. We do not consider that he has behaved well in the transaction. But our practice is to shut our eyes to a certain extent, and maintain the 'irrefragable' principle."

"Where did poor Mrs. Carter die?" said Miss Manuel. "I knew them very well."

Mr. Speedy, not at all displeased to be seen by the office on terms of agreeable familiarity with a "fine woman," became almost confidential and very voluble.

"At an out-of-the-way place," he said, "Bangor; and in, it seems, an out-of-the-way part of Bangor. We had a scarcely recognised agent there—a post-mistress, I think—and we never dreamed of business in such a place. However, we received the proposal, and the board accepted it. After the receipt of the second premium we received the claim. We made inquiries, but everything seemed regular. We trusted to those local doctors—a system I have always set my face against. It was, of course, a damaged life at the beginning. It is very sad how they do these things."

"But when I knew her," said Miss Manuel, "she was quite

healthy, and quite strong. Oh, it must have been a very sudden thing, I assure you. Poor, poor Mrs. Carter!"

This was the third time she had called the deceased lady "poor," and Mr. Speedy now looked at her a little earnestly. The bright lady looked at him unsuspiciously. ("There was something in her eyes," said Mr. Speedy, at dinner that day, pursuing his narrative to Mrs. Speedy, "about her eyes so strange and odd.") He looked round to see were the clerks listening. Suddenly the doors were flapping like heavy mahogany wings, and a gay gentleman came up—to be reflected in the mahogany.

"Well! here I have come again," he said. "You can't tire me. A large stock of patience on hand—a reserve fund, like your own."

Miss Manuel turned round and knew the voice. "Major Carter!" she said. "Why, I declare, Major Carter!" It was Major Carter, but he was altered. The gay young manner, which lay on him like a bloom, was dried off; he was not so bright, or, perhaps, so clean, and he had a sharper and more earnest, and even nervous manner. He started with astonishment and some confusion as he saw her and Mr. Speedy bent together over the counter.

"Miss Manuel!" he said. "So glad. Been well, I hope? But—er—why *here*?" he added, with a sort of sneering tone. "Ladies don't go round to Life offices as they go round shopping, eh?"

Mr. Speedy, who had been scanning him coldly, and did not relish his interview being interrupted, said now: "It is no use coming until the full board meets again. I told you so, Major Carter, before."

"Oh, quite right, quite right," he said, hastily; "I was only passing, and looked in. And so *you* are at this sort of thing? And why the 'Irrefragable?' No better office, of course," he added, hastily. "It is melancholy to be obliged to think of such things, and to have vile profit associated with those whose memory we love. But what can you do? Grown up sons, Miss Manuel, and a *little* extravagant. Ah, I can't treat myself to such a pure luxury as feeling."

Miss Manuel was looking at him steadily. "I was sorry to hear it," she said, "very sorry. So sudden, too. It must have been a great trial."

"It *was* a blow," he said, in a low voice, "a trial to us all. But, after all, we were prepared for it. She had been ailing a

long time; oh dear yes! That is," he added, hastily, "when I say a long time, I mean within a year. You are now in town? Ah, so glad! After all, poor Eastport; though, indeed, I know it brought us all our troubles. Indeed I felt for you. Must go now. Good-by. Morning, Mr. Speedy!"

With lip that fluttered nervously, the bright lady looked after him as the heavy door swung to and fro, as it were, in a rage. For a quarter of an hour more she and Mr. Speedy talked together; then the brougham drove away. As she swept round the corner, she saw the figure of Major Carter looking about cautiously. Her face flashed up. "It is beginning. It is coming!" she said. "In time the Lord will deliver them all into my hands. It is written on his face."

There *was* something written on Major Carter's face—at least, a different writing from the old light and careless hand familiar to all at Eastport. There, every day, a hundred gay little "devices," as airy and nonsensical as the mottoes in bon-bons, were to be read. Now, there was a serious "legend," written in contracted characters. She went home in a sort of elation. Life was beginning to have a zest. Often and often there had come great gaps and blanks, when all hope and interest, and even consciousness of life, had left her; when time and life and the gay things of the gay world round her, seemed only a long white monotonous reformatory gallery, with barred gates and windows—as dreary, as hopeless, as prostrating. She had nothing to live for. She was oppressed with the chilling blankness of loneliness. But *now* she was beginning to apprehend life, and the scattered objects of life were striking on her senses, for she was living, breathing, and moving towards a purpose.

As she drove up to her own door, she found a figure standing on the steps. It was Fermor—the outlawed Fermor, as he almost seemed to be now. She did not know that he had been lying there in wait. This image fitted harmoniously with all that was in her mind. *He* saw her drive up with one of his bitter "sore" smiles upon his mouth.

"I should have come a little later," he said, "and been received with the usual answer. The next thing, I suppose, will be, you will tell me with your own lips that you are not at home."

"The Lord," thought the inner Miss Manuel again, "will in good time deliver all into my hands." But the outer Miss Manuel, leaning on his arm to get out of her carriage, said, with bright eyes and soft encouragement, "I can see you are aggrieved

about something. Come in. No, I know you will not. I must be punished and made to feel."

Fermor walked up-stairs after her. She was never looking more dazzling than at that moment. What she had been thinking of had sent additional sparkles from her eyes. She was thinking how fast the fly was coming to the web—coming, too, of its own wish not to be kept out from the web—with a foolish eagerness to be caught. To *him*, this brilliance—a brilliance set off by dress, and choice of colour in dress—was almost confounding; and the feeling in his mind was a secret wonder how *this* had never struck him before in the old Eastport days. As he sat opposite to her on Mr. Romaine's "low chair," he looked, and looked again, and marvelled at what cloud had been between *his* eyes and her.

He was full of his grievances, and ready with indignant protest; but, as he looked, he began to soften. They fell into the category of those little outrages and insults which were a delightful and welcome little armoury for him in drawing-rooms.

"I am getting so used," he said, plaintively, "to hard knocks from all sides, that nothing comes upon me now as a surprise. I am persecuted for justice' sake. You, of course, only follow the crowd."

"Yes," said she, gaily, "I am now of the world, worldly. It is the only true course. Sentiment, scruples, delicacy, consideration, and the rest of it, are all waste of time and unprofitable. A la guerre, comme à la guerre. In the world, why not *as* the world?"

"Just what I thought," he said. "I have not lost my old power of judgment, though I suppose people say it is dulled. You are now sought and courted, and I suppose flattered. Every one that comes, pays, I suppose, for his welcome by some coin of this sort. You relish it every day more and more, and do not care for those who come unfurnished, or do not care to furnish themselves. I am not skilled in *that* sort of thing. *Once*, perhaps, I could do it as well as any of them."

Her eyes fell on the ground. Her voice became low, and soft, and plaintively musical. "I thought *you* understood me. You, who know the world by heart, should make allowance for some of that rouge and patches which we must all put on. *Once*, indeed, I knew life, and fell into its ways, but that was long, long ago, down at poor Eastport."

His eyes fell on the carpet too. "Ah! I begin to think those were very happy times," he said, sighing; "happier than will soon

come again." He did not see how she was looking at him, nor did he know how she was thinking how much faster Nemesis was walking than she had calculated. "Yes," he went on, "I often think of it—I do indeed—of your pleasant home, and the life we spent together." (He, in fact, often did, for there had been an excitement and uncertainty in the life, which had made it adventurous and agreeable to think of.) "I do not expect that you have yet learned to judge me fairly, or to make allowance for the cruel way I was treated; but you will in time, I am sure. Ah! I was indeed a victim."

A pang shot across her face. "Of course," she said, hastily. "As I said, we are all victims of circumstances. I could make allowance. I saw what engines were set at work. Someway, I cannot bring myself to talk of these things with the quiet indifference I ought. But every day I am learning, and *shall* learn. The world is a delightful master."

"I like to talk of old times," he said; "it has a sort of soothing effect. At home they do not understand these things. I can get no one to understand them. Practically, I am a stranger there. *You* understand me. I should like now and again to talk with you over such matters. But they are too pastoral and unsubstantial. The worldlings, it seems, and the flatterers, have stronger claims."

He was determined to force himself into the web. His foot was on the outer thread.

"How you misjudge me," she said, in the sweet key her voice sometimes sang in. "I am as you—we are strangely like—lost in a crowd of friends who are not friends. There is a tumultuous crowd pressing round me, and yet I am alone—as if I was in a desert. These pleasant airy chattering men, so light and gay, what do you suppose *they* can do but chill my heart? With you I could have sympathy. We are in the same tone. I could gradually come to know you better and better, and find a soothing comfort, as you say, in talking over old times, but—but——"

Greatly interested, Fermor said, hastily, "But what—why not tell me?"

She shook her head. "No, no; I have reasons. Better for me to keep in my present groove—go on as I have gone on. Forgetfulness, coldness, heartlessness, indifference—these are the medicines for me. I should have nothing near me like sympathy, manliness, generosity, love, nor appreciation. No, no. Now you will understand what seemed ungracious—what you took

for barring of doors against you! I thought you would have understood me better. So, I say, better cross over the street, and leave me on my own pathway."

Bewildered by this speech, and strangely interested, Fermor was not ready with a reply. Suddenly came pouring in the hollow world, the pleasant set who sat around Miss Manuel: critics, biographers, bishops, wits, and the rest.

He went his way in a strange exhilaration. After all, here was the old charm at work still. There was something strangely piquant about her. She made him talk as others did not make him talk. She was full of genius, and of the dramatic sense.

But there was a soft mystery about her last words—a pleasant confusion—above all, a compliment to *him*, in that persistent exclusion, that was welcome. He was pleased to find himself "rehabilitated," and he walked home with dreams floating before him—the old dreams of vanity and complacency. Work had been resumed with the censers. The old charm remained.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-FIRST.

LORD PUTNENHAM'S "LITTLE MUSIC."

A RIM of low, old-fashioned little houses, like dolls' houses, runs round a sort of hexagonal teaboard-shaped patch of green, called Hans-square, just at the back of Sloane-street. A slumbering monotony reigns there. The hall doors have a huddled hunchback air, and the houses themselves are squeezed close, like a crowd at a show where room is precious, and where stewards have been making people move up. Major Carter and his son had three rooms in one of these little houses—the parlour story and a cold little warren at the top, where the roof began to slope inconveniently just over the deal dressing-table. The major had seen troubles of late; things had not gone smoothly with him. "Poor Mrs. Carter's long illness was a heavy 'draw' upon us," he used to say. "She required many comforts, and all the care we could give her. Our doctor said change of air—keep moving about: and she had change of air, poor soul!"

Heavy business matters, too, were entailed on the major by the death of his wife—what he called "winding up her affairs" (in the Irrefragable Company) kept him in Hans-square. He

had to watch those "fellows," who were treating him in a shabby, unhandsome fashion. Otherwise, town was not nearly so suited to the major's life as the little realm of a watering-place. *There* he had everything under his hand: he could cover them all with his hat. "We were more thrown together there," he said. "Some of the pleasantest days of my life were spent at Eastport."

But there was yet another attraction. A stout, round, red, and wealthy lady, called Mrs. Wrigley, had a house in Cadogan-place, where, having twenty years before decently interred Joseph Wrigley, Esquire, Chairman of the United Bank, she lived in quiet and substantial splendour, and swung about London in a quaint old chariot. As the late chairman had been what is called "universally respected," so his relict was as sincerely admired. She was the object of many gallantries from young gentlemen and men of a more "suitable" age; and she treated these worshippers with mature coquetties, which did not seem in the least out of place, and were conventionally accepted by the circle in which she moved as quite becoming. Youths struggled who should "take her down"—i.e. to supper; and at parties younger pairs were often detained at the foot of the stairs, while she slowly passed down the straits—a sort of human reproduction of Turner's "Fighting Téméraire towed to her last Berth" by a light military tug.

Yet with these worldly elements she mixed a little religious seasoning. Until she came to know Major Carter, she affected the society of the Reverend Punsher Hill, a dissenting clergyman of a strong spiritual flavour, whose chapel was in the Chelsea district. There he poured out streams of holy hartshorn—the very Preston salts of divinity—and "drew" large crowds. With him was combined, in her society, a clergyman of the more established ritual, who sprinkled ess-boquet and rose-water from his pulpit, and made everything pleasant.

For these gentlemen a sort of "main" of tea was kept flowing in Cadogan-place. The odium theologicum did not, as it ought to have done, hinder their companionship. She had contributed handsomely to Mr. Punsher Hill's new conventicle, built for him by admirers of his Preston salts, which was called "Mount Tabor;" and she had given moneys to Mr. Hoblush for what he called his "visiting women." These two influences reigned until she came to know Major Carter. That worldling gradually began to undermine her faith, or at least her warm devotion. She was too good-natured to feel any change, or

show any change; but the worldling had more force of character than the two spiritualists. They felt themselves slipping as on a parquet floor, and soon the success of Major Carter was so marked as to attract public whispers, and public attention and public murmur, and public anger. She was delighted with his quiet air of the world; the others seemed untrained children near him. When his cold eye fell upon them, the two clergymen did not like the sensation.

One little transaction firmly established him, as suggesting the association of intellectual power and the command of men's minds. The two clergymen were sitting with her one afternoon, when Major Carter came in. But Mrs. Wrigley was not so interested in pious matters as she used to be. She talked to them of Lord Puttenham's coming music.

"I have done what I could," said the Reverend Alfred, sweetly, "but I have not sufficient interest. I would give the world to be there myself." As for Mr. Hill, it was understood without more allusion, that *his* walks were not the Puttenham walks. No reference was made to him.

Suddenly entered the worldling Carter, who began to chatter airily and delightfully on mundane topics—bringing in a little legend about Lady Mantower and Mrs. Weynam Lake. The clergy present looked at him ruefully. "All the world," continued the worldling, "is crowding to this Puttenham party—with his wife, of course. More the wife, perhaps, than the world;" and then he worked his text pleasurably and fluently for a half-hour, and then rose to go. He put his head in again. "By the way, Mrs. Wrigley," he said, "I have a message which I had forgotten. Strictly in private, though." He whispered, "I have ventured on a great liberty, but that is all right—the Puttenham affair, you know. It will come to-night. But a profound secret, I stipulate that."

The surpassing delicacy with which Major Carter had transacted this little affair—his very anticipation of her wishes, from that hour established his supremacy.

The town knew Lord Puttenham very well. He was sometimes darkly mentioned as the "noble Amateur." He was a musical lord, played "a little," *i.e.* execrably, on a crazy Cremona violin, and gave a little musical senate laws. There was no Lady Puttenham; and so, through his fine house in Dover-street strange and protracted agonies were heard, as of a maiden wailing, which was the musical lord busy with his "scales;" and sheets of music lay tossed here and there, high and dry on

chairs and cabinets, floating wildly on the carpet, as though there had been a wreck, and a great musical Indianman had gone to pieces in the drawing-room. The musical lord going about on duty, sat as a musical magistrate, and had cases brought before him, on which he passed judgment. New harmonious gipsies, eager to get a hearing, and who had brought either a voice, or a fiddle, or even a whistle, from the Continent, were led away to him, and adjudicated on. His head lay so much on one side with this listening, that the attitude became habitual and normal; though on occasions of extraordinary attention he listened with his head erect. Yet he was a selfish and practically useless nobleman. With all his audiences, his whispering in corners, his taking of buttons and button-holes, his shrugs, his showering of criticism and musical terms as from a dredger, he never did any real good for any new or wandering artist. And when one had, with infinite struggling, rowed into public favour, the musical lord came paddling at the stern with a little oar no bigger than a fan, and really enjoyed the credit of having contributed largely to the success.

In the large mansion in Dover-street, the musical Lord Puttenham gave entertainments, which were known mysteriously as "rich musical treats." These were a sort of dry Trappist *matinées* and evening "*réunions*," where the board was spread with music, and music only; and the tables groined with quaver *entrées*, and light crotchets *hors d'œuvres*, and a sparkling presto, served as champagne. Lord Puttenham always bewailed the decay of classical music, and did his best to restore it; and if a sort of "service," that lasted hours, the close to which was marked by the flutter of the turning of the twentieth page; and if faces of agony, and jaws hanging wearily, and mournful rustling on chairs, and acute pains about the spine, and welcome drowsiness (with some), and strange cerebral confusion (with others), and something like incipient idiocy (with one or two); if this was restoring classical music, Lord Puttenham did so effectually on every one of his "second Thursdays."

Strange to say, people came eagerly, nay, struggled to come—people of fashion, and people of quality, and people with daughters—like Lady Laura Fermor. Wise and wary woman! She saw that the soil was soft enough for rifle-pits. She saw that, from the hopeless and dispiriting character of the place, the warriors and chiefs would be driven in perforce upon what entertainment *she* could offer; and that in the arid desert character of the country, *her* daughters would stand out with an artificial

attraction, from the force of contrast. Noble—zealous—almost chivalrous commander! What she suffered in the way of austerities—for cane chairs, affording rude and imperfect support, were brought in, to economise space—will never be known. If holding out her poor arm day and night, and keeping her fingers closed till the nails grew through the palms—according to the Brahmin practice—could have helped forward her mission, she would have done it cheerfully. She did not know Lord Puttenham, but she soon "reached" him; and though the girls could move their ivory keys in the same rude way that they had learned the "dumb-bell" practice and the "pole" exercise at Madame Cartier's, and the graceful handling of the mallet—still they had qualified sufficiently, and could be rapturous in musical praise without falling into blunders.

On a certain second Thursday all the world was there. For weeks before, the Puttenham head, well to one side, had whispered, and hinted, and shrugged, of a new artist that he was bringing out; "A young Hungarian fellow; heard him last summer, in a common cabaret at Prague, absolutely a Common cabaret. I never heard 'Tone' before. A very unassuming young fellow. And I have got him to come to England. He will coin. He will put them all out,—Sainton and the whole gang. It was the merest chance I just turned in there. Otherwise he would have been fiddling away to Boors and Beer for the rest of his life. I *think* I know what Tone is; and I say distinctly, Tone has never been heard until now!" A melodious duke or two, an harmonious earl, were now moving their heads with accurate beat, in time to the lively rhythm of an "*Allegro Vivace*," the Promised Land coming into sight after months of wandering in sterile "*Adagios*."

Lord Puttenham had far more ladies than men coming to have the torture applied. Men did not suffer the "*Little Ease*" so cheerfully. They were restless. Once, indeed, three ill-conditioned "*cavalry fellows*," who had got shut hopelessly in the heart of the cane chairs, and not being trained to habits of restraint, rose at the end of a "*maestoso*," and rudely and loudly and conspicuously forced their way out through the company, causing great confusion. One was heard at the door using what Lord Puttenham called "*a ribald expression*," and which sounded in the key of "*utter rot!*" "*From that moment*," said Lord Puttenham, "*I have made it a rule never to ask any of those soldier people. Won't you have an Analysis, Lady Laura?*" said Lord Puttenham, handing her one. "*We have*

a 'rich treat' to-night. Only one daughter, I declare! Now, now!"

"We knew," said Lady Laura, "how *precious* space was to-night. We left poor Alicia Mary, whose *passion* is music. We shall get no seat, my dear" (this sharply aside to Blanche), "if you don't move on."

The place looked like the Tuileries' Gardens, there were so many cane chairs. It was crowded. Major Carter had "got" to the party. The fashionable paper had his name, also that of Young Brett, and of Captain and Mrs. Fermor. Miss Manuel had merely said to the noble host: "You must give me a few blank cards for those I like," and a whole sheaf had arrived. Mrs. Fermor had welcomed this promised treat with delight. She enjoyed music, and even the homily-classical music. "Oh," she said, "how kind of her, how charming, how we shall enjoy it!"

Fermor was still icy, and had plans of his own for that night. "I think you had better not go. It is really too great a tax upon a stranger. We could scarcely go upon such an invitation. If you like to go yourself with Miss Manuel——"

"Oh no, no. And you think so? But," she added a little quickly, and her cheeks beginning to glow, "I suppose the same argument will apply to us both?"

"Not at all," said he, colouring too. "You don't quite follow me."

This looked like the beginning of the cold skirmishings which lead to incompatibility. Mrs. Fermor went to her room, ready to cry like a child, or like a girl, as she was. But they both went, after all. Grim Mr. Carlay came stalking down from his rooms on the stairs; he somehow heard weeping, and appeared before Fermor in his study. The metal in his face seemed to have assumed a greater tightness and density. There was an air and manner about him that was irresistible. His remonstrances—for they were only remonstrances—seemed to be edicts. They went together; but Fermor went chafing, as though he had been a free man chained to a convict, whom he must take with him.

When they got there, the concert had begun. They had arrived at Somebody's "Grand Posthumous Quatuor in E minor," dedicated to the Princess Szelisky, which was being interpreted by these four artists:—

Ragwitz Béla,
Krowski,
Smart (alto),
and M. Piletti (cello).

Ragwitz Béla was the young violinist whom the host had discovered in the "pothouse."

These four gentlemen had travelled many posts, at a sort of steady amble, along a high road "moderato," until they reached the last bar, when it was thought they would draw rein and bait. But Lady Laura, who had secured end chairs for her party, a judicious coign of 'vantage, and who already was suffering mental and physical pain, and had been glancing wearily from side to side, now sadly convinced that a harem-like seclusion was indeed to prevail, saw, with a sudden sinking of the heart, some thirty pages "turned back" with a loud flutter, and the four artists begin their journey again. It was a "repeat." When the stage was happily accomplished, there was a little pause, and Lord Puttenham led off applause, with interjections of "What tone! I never heard tone before!" Then came an entreating "Hu-s-sh!" for the "quatuor" had recovered its instruments, and was proceeding slowly into the "adagio."

This might be described to be a musical interment—they proceeded at such a slow and mournful walk—Ragwitz Béla leading and drawing out wailing strokes with contortionate agonies—sometimes laying his fiddle like a dish under his own throat, as though he were decollated; sometimes quivering and straining as if he wished to drive his instrument into his neck and lay it finally against the short joints of the spine; sometimes struggling with it, sometimes churning with it; sometimes making spasms with his knee and foot, as though he meant to rise and fly away through the air with it. The others went to the work gloomily, and with awful concentration; and Piletti, who had charge of the violincello, seemed to have a sort of infant's coffin between his knees.

The mortuary music was at last over. Lady Laura, already worn and haggard, but still "coming up smiling," was feeling the cane pressure acutely. Poor soul! she was old, and tall of figure, and required little comforts at home and abroad, not the rafter-like support imparted by cane chairs. Yet she smiled on, and took care that smiling should be kept up in the ranks; and when Providence at last brought the "first part" to a conclusion, she had a smile for Lord Puttenham drifting by her, and an ejaculation of ecstasy, "How lovely! Did you ever hear anything like it?"

A light and airy repast (as though the host was belonging to a severe Order) was laid on the stairs; and yet the company

poured out and flung themselves on it with an avidity that seemed to hint that they had been shipwrecked and newly taken off a rock. Mrs. Fermor sat penned up on a centre chair, her eyes fixed on Ragwitz Béla, whom she thought divine. Miss Manuel was in another part, while Fermor made part of a small crowd herded together at the door. Rude persons were pressing on him: and early in the night, when he was whispering a pleasant sarcasm to young Bridges, Lord Puttenham had tapped him bluntly on the shoulder, and said, rather roughly, "You must go outside, sir, if you want to talk." He was looking over at Miss Manuel—looking sourly—for sitting beside her was that "low, ill-bred, insolent" Mr. Romaine, who had been so forward at the brougham door.

It was at this happy release—the end of the first part—that Mr. Romaine left Miss Manuel, and came over to Mrs. Fermor. Fermor was about offering to take down Miss Manuel, when Lord Puttenham, just behind him, touched him on the arm: "Beg pardon, let me pass, please. Miss Manuel, come!" And Miss Manuel went away gaily on Lord Puttenham's arm. As she passed Mrs. Fermor she stooped down and whispered, "Be kind to poor Romaine to-night. He is afraid of you. He is to be pitied, poor fellow. Guess who are here—the Massingers, who were to have been in Rome. You will, I am sure." And, pressing her arm affectionately, she passed on.

"You are still angry," said Mr. Romaine; "I can see it. Yet I am the one who ought to suffer, after that awful onslaught on me the other day."

Mrs. Fermor bit her red lip, but smiled in spite of herself. "You began," she said.

"I know," he said; "I always begin. Every man and every woman tells me so. And yet I cannot help it. I am worried and tried. No one understands me, or, of course, tries to understand me. Why should they, indeed?"

Mrs. Fermor looked at him with bright and sympathising eyes. "You judge us all very harshly," she said; "we are not all so bad as you think."

"Why not?" he said. "I begin to hate the world. I used to believe in it. I found my account in it, for I never accepted the rubbish about a 'hollow world,' and its faithlessness, and *that* cant. But now I feel shaken. I have seen something to-night that has shaken me. If that faith has left me, I have nothing to trust to."

Mrs. Fermor was filled with a sort of missionary enthusiasm.

She thought how, in her own weak way, she might confirm and strengthen this strange being.

"I can feel for you," she said, softly, "indeed I can. But I would not give way, if you would listen to me. I would fight bravely—as I know you have done," she added, colouring a little at her own boldness; "you would struggle on, and you would find strength as you went on, and you would, at the end, conquer, and conquer splendidly. You should do that, Mr. Romaine, and you would be helped by the sympathies of your friends. It is only a sacrifice, and we must all make sacrifices."

She was quite excited, and he looked at her half astonished, half interested.

"Well," he said, a little roughly, "and was I not willing to make sacrifices? I went through it all, and suffered, God knows how much. No matter! the thing was done, and here is the whole thing to begin again. But I forget, you don't know what I am talking of."

"But I do," said Mrs. Fermor, with a naïve toss of her head. "I have heard, and, indeed, I sympathise."

"There!" said Mr. Romaine, bitterly, and looking across the room; "that was once my Marguerite. She has married Valentine after all, and become homely. Look at him over there—Fatuity incorporate! Yet Valentine is restless and troubled in his mind. He doesn't relish Marguerite's doings. I almost wish he may be more troubled yet."

"Hush, hush!" said Mrs. Fermor, with coquettish reproof. "You have promised to struggle, recollect."

"And how am I to do it? I am alone. I have no one to help me—to encourage me."

Mrs. Fermor smiled.

"We will all do our best. That is not much, but we will try."

"If," said Mr. Romaine, looking at her fixedly, "there was any one who would bear with me, and talk with me, and whisper good things now and again, and say kind words of encouragement when I felt my strength giving way——" He stopped and waited a moment.

With great eagerness, and longing to make a neophyte of him, and have the glory of converting one of these rude rough splendidly savage men, Mrs. Fermor said, with a smile, that she would be glad to have this Samaritan office—now and again.

Alas! This was but a fatal species of missionary labour, and Miss Manuel, sweeping by on Lord Puttenham's arm to her chair, saw the two faces close together, and the little innocent delight in Mrs. Fermor's, and a sort of flash of triumph in the other's. Behind Miss Manuel was walking Nemesis like a page.

Young Brett did not come that night until late. Miss Manuel had been looking for him, and beckoned to him from the door, where he had made one of the herd. He flew to her. "Sit down beside me," she said. "Get that chair." A lady, with the true selfishness which is roused by chairs, was adroitly spreading herself over two chairs, which she seemed to occupy debatably—not wholly on or wholly off. Another claimant she would have frozen off with look, manner, or answer. But there was a good-humoured graciousness about Young Brett which saved him, and a sort of homage which she took as payment for the chair. He was allowed to take it.

"My dear child," said Miss Manuel, "you have been always so true, and so kind, and so faithful to me, and to us all, that I would ask of you things that I would not ask of others. Would you do something for me now—something very troublesome, and very important?"

"Oh!" said Young Brett, in a tumult of gratitude—it was as though she had accepted the gun at last—"how kind, how good of you! *Now* you are making me happy. What is it?"

She was indeed making him happy. For months he had been panting to get an opportunity to do something for her. He thought it was money, and he had plunged his hand eagerly into his pocket.

Miss Manuel smiled. "No, no," she said, "not that. Then I may tell you? Would you go on a journey for me?"

Young Brett half jumped up. "Is that all? To be sure. When—now? Though—Oh my goodness!" and his face fell. "I have to join the day after to-morrow. What shall I do?"

"Join, of course," said she, good-humouredly. "I must go myself—I shall not get any one else."

"But I *must* go," said he, in real distress. "I shall manage it—leave it to me. I know some one that will get the leave for me—and if they don't, why—I am beginning to get very tired of the whole business—and——"

"Not for the world!" said she, in real alarm. "You must not think of it."

"But I see how it can be done," he said, joyfully, "and without that. Leave it to me. Where do you want me to go?"

"First, then," said she, "it is to be secret. The place is Beaumaris, in Wales, and the house is called Bangor House, looking on the green. Now, I want you to go down, lodge there for a week or ten days, and find out all about the people who lodged there before—that is, seven or eight months ago. It will be useful for me to know. Mind, everything. Everything will be welcome, and everything useful. Will you think it cruelly unreasonable to do this?"

She saw delight in his face, and gratitude too, for being chosen for such a mission.

"This is really kind," he said; "I was getting so bored with London. I was really thinking of a week at Bangor, or some of those places. It just falls in nicely—that is, I mean," he added, growing grave as he thought of his first statement, "if I can leave."

"Hu-sh!" came from Lord Puttenham; "no talking, please! H-ush!"

In fact, the second part was beginning, and Ragwitz Béla was now giving his great Hungarian solo, Verbocsy Czárdás, in which he first "agonised," and swung, and shocked, and wailed, and quivered through a "largo appassionato," and presently was plucking, and tearing, and mangling his strings (as though they had been his own hair) through ten terrible spasms, called "variations." He worried his violin as though it were a rat; he seemed to long to bring his teeth into play, and to work at it with that extra power. He dug his fingers into its bowels, and seemed to root and tear at its heart. He made it yell and groan and crack; and, at the end of each variation, tucked it violently under his arm, as it were to smother it up like a child, and mopped his face and hands in moist exhaustion. This was Ragwitz Béla and his solo, which at last happily ended.

Later on, Mr. Romaine was looking with interest on his pleasant little missionary. Said he to her, with a sort of low plaintive music he would throw into his voice: "I have a rude log-house of my own, rude and unfurnished as myself. Civilised people call it 'Chambers.' There I can be as lonely and as savage as I like. Sometimes the Charitable come and see me, and relieve my wants. I have curiosities to show—something that would amuse. At least, people tell me so. I could get your friend Miss Manuel to come, and if you would care to meet her there, to-morrow evening, say at five——"

But Mrs. Fernor shrunk away from this scheme. Alarm came into her face. Mr. Romaine was hurrying on too fast, and

this was being too bold. She answered coldly, and yet with agitation—

"No, no. I never go anywhere in *that* way. Don't ask me, please. No—I am very sorry."

She seemed to awake suddenly. At the new Missionary Ordination had gone for nothing. Mr. Romaine did not relish any plan of his being rejected; so he rose hastily, and flung himself on his feet. "Very well," he said. "With all my heart. I am sorry. But it can't be helped." He stalked away to the door. ("He is a dangerous person," thought Mrs. Fermor, looking after him in dread.) At the door he passed Miss Manuel.

"Poor Romaine!" she said. "Keep up your heart. Things will go better another time, and in another direction. But recollect, I warned you! You think a little too highly of yourself!"

"I shall not go with you to supper to-night," he said. "At least, I have half determined not to. But it is not over yet, *that* little business."

Lady Laura Fermor had sat unto the end—would have sat had it been hours longer. Faithful captain! She had ceased to suffer pain. A sort of dull numbness came on. One would have said she was enjoying pleasure, for she hung out mechanical smiles, like Signs, at regular intervals. And she found her reward. For the youth, Lord Spendlesham, whose father was happily dead (within three months, but the boy had really shown feeling in keeping himself retired so long), was there in decent black gloves, and had actually got to a chair beside Blanche. He was rich, empty, vain, and foolish—a combination of good qualities that Lady Laura always admired.

At the end of Lord Puttenham's musical party, Miss Manuel was at the door, on the inside, and people, as they passed, had little flying "chats," each no longer than ten seconds. That night she was to have one of her compact little suppers, and she was enrolling a few. Young Brett, with confidence and the brightness of hope on his little forehead, posted past her. There was meaning in his eyes. She was talking with Westley Kerr, an agreeable man, when Young Brett said, meaningly, as he passed, and with secret mystery—

"Bangor House, Beaumaris—all right, Miss Manuel!" and she smiled to him that he was right.

But the next instant a face was put round the door from the outside—Major Carter's face, but so drawn and contorted, so

contracted with fury, terror, and wonder, that Miss Manuel hardly knew it. It was laid against the sill of the door, and came close to hers.

"Take care!" he said. And though the voice was low and hoarse, he broke into the old trained smile. "Take care, I warn you! What you are doing is dangerous. I tell you in time, take care, or——"

"Take care!" said Lord Puttenham's cheery voice. "Good gracious! what is Miss Manuel to take care of, Carter?"

"Of the draught, my lord," said Major Carter, pleasantly. "Standing in these doorways is a little perilous. I give warning in time always."

A flash of fire passed from Miss Manuel's eyes direct to his face. "I have a strong constitution," she said, "and fear nothing."

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-SECOND.

TO EUSTON-SQUARE.

FERMOR had been watching restlessly from a distance. Somehow he was troubled and disturbed in his mind on the subject of Miss Manuel. He had an uneasy sensitiveness about being overlooked by her, and to his ears had drifted a whisper of the coming "little supper." Westley Kerr—"a trading wit," a "mere professional ladies' man" (this was the disparaging description in his mind)—had passed him with a sort of exulting patronage. "They want me at the Manuel house to-night. One of the old little suppers, you know. Not going? Why, I thought *you* were an intimate there."

He strode across to her. "She cannot mean," he thought, "to mark me in this fashion."

"Good night," said Miss Manuel to him. "I am going a little earlier. I have a few choice friends to-night. *You*, unhappily, are disqualified. I have rules which you know, and which I cannot break through."

He bit his lip. "Look over there!" she said, "I am getting fond of *her*. I want you to be domestic—to be a proper model family man—a chronicler of the small beer. Seriously I wish this. You have all the virtues for home life, and I want you to

cultivate them. You will shine in that department, whereas in our poor company of fools and triflers you would be lost. So I tell you, candidly, I am not going to ask you."

There was a mixture of contempt, badinage, and haughtiness, in the way she spoke these words. Fermor was altogether overpowered, and could hardly reply.

"Oh, as you please," he said; "you have, of course, the right——"

"Of course I have," she said, laughing. "Now go over, and let me see you in a conjugal light. It will be a treat. I must gather my little flock together, now. Where is Mr. Romaine?"

Mr. Romaine had just left Mrs. Fermor, having brought her up from Lord Puttenham's slender restoratives. She had been very earnest, and prettily earnest, in her work of conversion, and was quite elated with her progress. For that whole evening almost she had purposely "kept Mr. Romaine to herself," and he had not even spoken to the blonde bride. She had indeed aided him in his brave struggle. Fermor came up to her chafing and disgusted. "We must come away," he said, somewhat roughly. "We have had more than enough of this place. I am sure you can't want to stay longer." The tone jarred on Mrs. Fermor in her present missionary excitement. She was beginning to be deeply hurt by her husband's late neglect. She could not help answering, "You have not helped to make it so agreeable to me."

"Ah!" he answered, "I suppose you will now go straight to your father, and bring me to judgment before him. We always had tell-tales at school."

They entered their house in silence. She went up-stairs without a word; he was turning into his study for a moody and hopeless meditation, almost raging against that cold heartless woman, whom he had now finally done with, when a page came to the door and handed him a note. It ran—

"Can you forgive me? I have been worried the whole night, and took it into my head to try you. You came out of it angelically. It is all my own helplessness, and I suppose I do not know how to treat you. Of course you would not come now. I have no right to expect it: and yet—there is a place at the round table.
"P. M."

Hesitating, pleased, angry, fretful, elated, doubtful, Fermor at last went forth slowly, got into a cab, and drove away to Alfred-place.

Mrs. Wrigley had sat and suffered through Lord Puttenham's musical party. Major Carter had been at her feet, figuratively, the whole night. He had talked to her of his finer friends, and the finer houses where he was intimate. All her life—which had been strongly impregnated with the City—she had panted and thirsted after the choice hunting-grounds of society. She listened with curiosity and an oily glance of tenderness. The major was rapidly drawing near to the golden gates of proposal, when he would knock and show his papers, and beg that he might be allowed to pass.

He had just gone to look for the heavy old-fashioned chariot, and was coming back with news of it (he had stopped outside the door to have speech with some friend), when he heard those Welsh names which had contorted his face so terribly. For a moment he had forgotten the old swinging chariot, and the lady who swung in it; but the smooth look had come back to his face again, and he was presently carefully and kindly guiding Mrs. Wrigley down-stairs. At the chariot door she said—there was a coquettishness in this interview at the chariot door—"You will come to-morrow, Major Carter, at the usual hour. We shall expect you. I shall be not at home for 'those men.'" (Alas! for poor Hoblush and Punsher Hill!)

But the major's face was overcast. He answered in trouble: "I am so sorry, so grieved; but pressing business calls me away to the country to-morrow."

Mrs. Wrigley languished, said he must be sure and not stay away long; and coquettishly pulled the glass of the old chariot between her and the major, as she thought she had already risked scandal.

Major Carter walked away to Hans-place. He found his son up—a quiet, unquestioning, and dutiful youth, of whom he often complained that he had to find brains for him, and thought, and a sort of earthly providence. He accepted his father in every situation without so much as a doubt, which was an advantage. He was a good-looking youth, too.

The impatience and contortion that was on the major's face in the room of the fashionably smooth smirk he had taken out with him, struck young Carter; but he asked no questions.

"Where's that Bradshaw," said the major, roughly, "that was knocking about here? Now, when it is wanted, it can't be got."

The son found it, and brought it. As the father's face was bent over the lamp to read, the light played upon worn furrows and gullies, and strange twists of sour impatience.

"It will answer," he said, "for a wonder. Where's that hand-bag?"

He began to thrust a few things into it, talking as he did so. "I have to go away for a couple of days. Don't mention to any one that I am out of the house. Now mind! Not a word! Good God, how I am persecuted! I shall just catch a slow train. Good-bye!"

Major Carter hurried out of the house, carrying his hand-bag, and shut the door softly behind him. He got into a cab. He passed Lord Puttenham's house, where the lights were still in the windows, where the link-boys were still shouting hoarsely, and where the hall door, opening now and again, showed a patch of brilliancy.

By that time Mrs. Wrigley was at her dressing-glass, being unscrewed and ungirthing, and approaching more nearly the normal figure of a Seal. Softly amorous of her admirer, she was receiving the hired homage of her maid.

At Euston-square, Major Carter asked for a ticket for Bangor, and got ready for a dreary and miserable night.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-THIRD.

MISS MANUEL'S "LITTLE SUPPER."

HARDING HANAPER, M.P., her Majesty's Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Westley Kerr, Dr. Jay, F.R.S., and Mrs. Jay, Colonel Langton, C.B., Gr. Gds., and Webster—someway always spoken of without the homage of "Mr.," or the familiarity of a Christian name, a dry saturnine satirist, rather inclined to be silent—these formed the fringe of Miss Manuel's little supper-table. The company were in spirits, and came inclined to be gay. The fire was blazing, the table was lighted with pink wax in white china candlesticks, Everything was delicate and inviting.

Webster settled his napkin about his limbs with anticipatory satisfaction. "I think Puttenham gives the best parties in London," he said. "There are none I like so well."

Harding Hanaper, fair and simpering, and considered to be a young official of great promise, knew there was something

masked under this speech. "Come," he said, "explain." He had almost said, "will the Honourable Member explain."

"They fit the mind for enjoyment," said Webster, appraising the dishes. "Don't you see? It is like being in jail for a year, or being on a regimen, and *then* eating what you like—or on a desert island, or in a spiritual retreat, or——He takes good care to leave no knives and forks in the way. What a narrow soul the man has!"

"The prostration that comes on me in that place," said Harding Hanaper, bathing his hand in his long hair, "the languor, the loathing of life——"

Miss Manuel's supper consisted of delicate game and other dainties. Champagne lay cooling in the centre, like an Indian belle on an ottoman enjoying the punkah.

Suddenly Fermor entered with a sort of shyness, for he found a ring of faces that were strange to him. But Miss Manuel sheltered him promptly.

"Here is a place next to me, Captain Fermor. Mr. Hanaper, become acquainted with Captain Fermor, and help him!" Then, in a low voice, "I see you are not too proud; and you might have humiliated me. So, I am grateful."

"I saw you at Lord Puttenham's," said Harding Hanaper, graciously, and again dipping his hand in his hair.

"Escape of another convict from Portland," said Webster, suddenly. "So I see by the evening papers. Let us drink him." And he bowed to Fermor ceremoniously.

Fermor was pleased at this company. He recollected Romaine at once. Miss Manuel had a way of making it felt among her subjects that she wished a protégé to be respected, and Romaine, though he did not relish Fermor, and would have liked, as he had said before, "to break him like a stick upon his knee," yet still was trained to affect a sort of respect towards him. Even "Webster," ready to crunch him, as he was crunching the wing of a snipe, bones and all, and having a snarl ready, forbore, and was gracious.

Fermor was flattered by this universal homage. In the rest, towards each other, there was a republican familiarity which almost made him shiver. About "Webster" especially there was a good-humoured bitterness and shortness—long silences, during which he was busy with his snipe; and when he was casting about for more, coming out with something short and smart. Every now and again he squeezed a lemon.

"I shall help myself, Miss Manuel," he said, stretching over

to the champagne. "The new Miss Jenkinson, who has just come out! Look! She shines and glistens like this bottle."

Fermor listened, and said something in his old manner, which was welcomed with general cordiality. He was not altogether an outlaw, he felt. This was something like the old life. He kept up a kind of confidential talk with Miss Manuel. Under that soft light she seemed to glow, and glitter, and flash, like a precious stone.

"I ought to be at home," he said, in the low, half-injured tone he was so fond of. "It is my proper place. I have been told so, at least. I am *now* more fitted to adorn humdrum life than this sort of scene."

"Ah! you are thinking of the way I went on to-night. I know you are," she said, looking down. "I am so strange, and behave so strangely. I have Spanish blood in me, and I must curb myself in everything I like—even mortify myself—or else I don't know where I should end!"

With a sort of glimpse of the meaning of this mysterious language, Fermor waited to hear more.

"You don't know me," she said, hurriedly. "I am one of those natures that must rule myself, or be ruled by myself. Sometimes I dare not trust myself. Is it not better, then," she added, half piteously, "to run the risk of seeming rough, and brusque, and blunt—and, in fact, what you are not, than——?" She paused.

"Than what?" said Fermor, almost tremulously interested, for now he was seeing quite distinctly.

Romaine was looking on from across the table—perhaps listening. Fermor saw the contemptuous glance on his lip, and was pleased. Of course *he* was not pleased at the preference, and this put Fermor into great good humour.

Soon Miss Manuel fell again into the same tone. "Do *you* like this sort of thing?" she said, in a half melancholy tone. "I think I shall not have them again—I shall give them up. You are smiling," she went on, "because you know me, and how little able I am to keep to a resolution. You know I went out to-night with a firm resolve *not* to ask you here. I bound myself up almost by a vow, and yet here you are sitting next to me."

Again Fermor smiled. The old armour was still bright, and the sword still sharp. "What have I done?" he said in a low voice. "I know I have many faults; but still——"

"More," she went on, "I want you to promise me one thing, that you will be generous——"

"Generous!" repeated Fermor.

"Yes, generous," she said. "You have conquered me to-night. Let me have some little victories in future. I *want* to train myself, and shall do so. Why not let me? You have everything at home, why not be content? No, we shall have no more little suppers. I want to live in the world as I have hitherto done—without heart, or softness, or esteem, or regard—in what is called the hollow world. You understand me. Do, I conjure you, let me, and rub Alfred-place out of the map of London."

Some one struck in at this point, and with a sentence came between Fermor and Miss Manuel. When she returned to him she said, "Do you know who was to have been here to-night, or, at least, I asked him? Poor Hanbury."

Fermor started and coloured. "He has come back," she said; "he has been doing the savage travelling, Gabooning it, and that kind of thing. He never cared for it really; but I suspect, poor fellow," she added, in a low voice, "he had another object besides gorillas. He wanted to get rid of his old self. You see," she added, slowly, "he was very sensitive, and allowed things to take hold of his mind, which another more sensible would have fought off. And the worst is, he is come back just the same as when he went out, after all the Gabooning."

Fermor did not lift his eyes. Was this a reproach of hers, or merely accidental?

"Poor soul!" she went on, "(poor fool! Webster over there would say), he is greatly altered. You remember, he was a sort of rosy, hearty, farmer-like creature. Now you would not know him; he is a dry, gaunt, silent being. Ah, the poor old John Hanbury!" she added, mournfully. "He died out with the dead past. The iron has entered into his soul, as Mr. Webster would say—in his comic way."

She laughed a little harshly, and rose. "Now," she said, gaily, "for the drawing-room; there is a better fire there."

During this little supper Miss Manuel's brother had sat silent, and apparently moody. He had altered a good deal since the Eastport days, wore a large coal-black beard, while his black, bright eyes roved from side to side with a look of inquiry. Sometimes he spoke; but he usually seemed to have something on his mind, and was reckoned "odd." Still he was accepted as a useful male chaperon for his sister. She was always noticed as being very kind and gentle to him, almost humouring him.

When they had gone up into the drawing-room, Harding Hanaper, who affected the character of the overworked official, who could yet by ability combine late hours and pleasure with all the drudgery of business, came over to Miss Manuel for some private talk. He leant his elbow on the chimney-piece. The others were boisterously pleasant.

"I shall have to be up at six," he said, languidly, "to make up for this. A shoal of people will be wanting answers by to-morrow. I must look into their papers before I go to bed. Old Pocock—*your* friend, Miss Manuel, he calls himself—is persecuting us at the office. I believe we shall have to give him something—for *your* sake." Miss Manuel opened her great eyes with surprise, or indifference. It might be either. "I believe he would be glad to get even the Lee-Boo Coast, poor soul: he has come very low indeed."

"The Lee-Boo Coast!" said Webster, striking in; "who are you sending out there? Who are Harding Hanaper's enemies? It is murder."

"The average of human life on that coast," said Mr. Hanaper, placidly, "is commonly from eighteen months to two years. The salary is but nine hundred pounds. So it really amounts to this: we buy a man's life from say thirteen hundred to eighteen hundred pounds. We can't get a bishop at all."

"What! an Apron unavailing?" said Webster.

"It will be vacant in two or three months," said Harding Hanaper; "the two years are nearly run out. Yet poor old Pocock is wild for the place. I suppose we must let him have it. We can give him nothing else. He is too old, and too old fashioned, and will bring us into a scrape."

With gentle persuasion, and almost seductive intercession, Miss Manuel made a request to the official. "*You must spare him,*" she said, "for my sake. I will not have my old man sacrificed on the Lee-Boo Coast. He would die in a week."

"But he will die in a week if we do not send him" said Mr. Hanaper. "He looks quite worn and fretful with anxiety."

"No matter," said Miss Manuel, "he shall not be murdered officially. We shall keep him at home for his own good—like a child."

"Very well," said Harding Hanaper; "I shall recollect your orders."

The little gay cohort was gone and scattered; and Miss Manuel was left alone with her brother. It was past two. As usual, the brightness fled suddenly from her face. A strange,

weary, and hopeless look came in its place. The brother looked at her gloomily, and with eyes rolling darkly.

"This life!" she said, "my soul revolts against it. I am sick at heart. It is turning me into a demon."

"I never took my eyes off him to-night," said her brother, gloomily, "never. I was thinking how strange to have him so near me, and to be so calm and friendly with him. Ah! he little knew!"

"But this is all so wicked—so *horribly* wicked," said she, starting up. "How can I go on with it? Only to-night to see that poor soft child—whom I am really getting to love—to see her falling gradually into the power of that bold man."

His face lightened. "And she is? I thought so to-night. All is going well, then." Then suddenly changing his voice, "No, Pauline, no going back now. Or," he added, slowly, and with a meaning that *she* understood, "if *you* are tired of the business, or have forgotten what we owe to our darling, whom at one time *you* said was murdered, as much as a girl was murdered by knife, or rope, or poison, why—have done with it, then, and leave it *all* to me. *My* course shall be shorter, and perhaps sharper."

"No, no," she said, hastily. "I don't wish that. But the poor girl that loves me, who is trustful and gentle, why must *she* be destroyed?"

"Every one of them," said he, savagely. "We shall spare none. I am glad she is soft and trustful and tender, very glad. So much the better.* Violet was soft and tender too. Ah, poor darling! and how was *she* treated?"

There was a pause. Pauline then spoke. "I am not equal to this sort of struggle," she said; "it is confusing me. No matter, as you say, we must go on."

Fermor went home that night in a state of wild exultation. He still "lived;" he was not in a state of "social dotage," thank Heaven! The old power survived. It was wonderful the curious attraction he still exercised on every one coming within his sphere. He was passive. He had long since ceased to care for these little triumphs; but the old power remained, in spite of influences whose interest it was to hold him in contempt and subjection.

As he entered his hall the clock struck two. He went upstairs softly, still smiling to himself. The door of the settlement on the stairs opened, and the grim Carlay figure stood before

him, with a light in its hand. "Would you come in here," it said.

Fermor's recent triumph had made him defiant. This sudden return to the rude prose of life jarred on him. "I really cannot," he said. "You must excuse me to-night. You must put off your remonstrance, or lecture, until the morning."

Mr. Carlay made three strides towards him, and grasped his arm as in a steel vice. "No trifling," he said. "You know me! Stay, then, where you are, and listen to me. I gave you a warning a short time ago. How are you attending to that warning?"

Fermor burst out in a fury. "This yoke is getting intolerable!" he said, drawing back. "What title have you to lecture me and bring me to account in this way? Once for all, Mr. Carlay, I give you notice——"

"Hush!" said the other, "I give you notice. Take care what you are doing. Do you suppose this has any effect upon me? I am not thinking of myself now, but of *her*. And I tell you solemnly, and I call Heaven to witness," here his long stiff arm was lifted, "that this must not, and shall not, go on! I have snatched my daughter from death once before, and I will not have her life risked again. *Mind*. There have been passages in my life that you cannot guess at. And if warnings are of no use, and it comes to this, that there is to be a choice of lives between hers and any other's—no matter whose it is—there shall not be a moment's hesitation. Her life before all: my life after hers cheerfully. Yours. So—take care. I know where you were to-night. You will find her in the drawing-room. Good-night!"

He disappeared into his settlement. Fermor was left in darkness. In presence of this being he lost his self-possession. But he was scared by the dark meaning of his significant hints, which he could not but accept as genuine. The cold withering sarcasm and contempt of his look and manner, as he met the weary, injured, anxious face of his wife in the drawing-room, it would be hard to describe.

"Where *have* you been?" she said.

He threw the very concentration of contempt and anger into his look and manner. "Though you may run to tell your father and protector of this speech, you shall never, between you, reduce me to such abject slavery! I tell you this much: I shall never forget to-night. Fortunately, there are places, outside *this* house, where I am still liked and appreciated. I shall say no more."

Mrs. Fermor was not of the guild of suffering wives. She was warm and quick of temper. Her bright eyes flashed. She answered him with the heat of wounded pride and repelled affection. That was all for himself, she said. He was welcome to choose his house, and to choose his company. With glowing cheeks she drew herself up with proud defiance, and said that *she*, too, was independent, and could find amusement and appreciation elsewhere. As to what he said about "tale bearing," she scorned it.

She was still in her Puttenham finery—in her tulles and flowers and "low neck." The wreath was on her little head, and the flowers rustled and shook as she spoke with trembling voice, and threw down this challenge to her husband.

He was astonished. "So this is the way you meet me, then," he said. "With all my heart! You have me at an advantage. I have been bought and sold. This is one of the grand mistakes of life found out too late! Poor Eastport! Ah!"

A twitch came into Mrs. Fermor's face at that allusion. It confirmed her. "Very well!" she said.

That very night, or morning rather, Mrs. Fermor went to her desk, and, with compressed lips and trembling fingers, wrote a little note. The little note was to Mr. Romaine. It was prettily and coquettishly worded, saying that she would be at his Chambers at five o'clock; and she was so eager it should reach him promptly, that she sent out her maid to post it in the nearest "pillar box." After she had done this, her pink lips were pressed together a little vindictively.

In a sort of excitement, she dressed herself the next afternoon for a little expedition. She felt a sort of flutter, as though it were an enterprise of great moment and anxiety. But she was determined to be free and independent, and to do something that would *commit* her to being free and independent. And in a quiet little brougham, that was sometimes hired for her, and glowing like a fresh pulled rose, she drove away to Mr. Romaine's "log-house."

She stepped out boldly, and almost gave a wistful look up and down the street, perhaps in the hope that Captain Fermor might be passing by, to see her glove thrown down.

Such a "log-house" indeed; that is, accepting the richest stuffs, the most gorgeous arms, gold, silver, china, leopard-skin rugs, and filigree lamps, as the rude materials with which log-houses are ornamented. Mr. Romaine came out and met her at the door like a sultan from his palace.

She looked in timorously, and shrank back. For the sultan had no one with him. "Afraid?" he said. "Quite right. I was prepared. With you I had asked all the polite conventionalities, but they have not come."

Mrs. Fermor drew back again. "No, no," she said, "you could scarcely ask me. Married ladies do not pay visits to gentlemen in this way."

Mr. Romaine gave a loud and genuine laugh. "If all these castans, and cloaks, and damascened blades had tongues, how noisily they would contradict you!"

Mrs. Fermor looked at him with a little alarm, and turned to go.

His voice became soft of a sudden, and entreating. "What, no comfort to-day for the poor lonely outcast! No encouragement! If you were only to know how much better I feel since last night—how much *stronger* and better able to struggle——But what is this to you?"

"A great deal," said Mrs. Fermor, warmly; "it gives me more pleasure than anything I could hear. But you must promise me to go on, and do your best."

"Why should I?" he said, gloomily. "No one cares to help me. Look here," he said; "read *that*. Just sent here, not ten minutes before you came. And I am expected to be steady and keep straight."

It was a sort of Lilliputian note, signed "Virginia Massinger," the name of the fair blonde girl. It said that she was coming that afternoon to see him, and to talk over old times.

Mrs. Fermor was astounded.

"Now you see," he said, "how *I* live, and what I have to go through. The best way is not to affect anything quixotic, but to go by the old road. So now, good-bye, Mrs. Fermor. Let me see you down."

Mrs. Fermor paused. She was a warm, impulsive creature, and full of enthusiasm. She seemed to hear a secret call to her, to help, and protect this strange, struggling, even noble heart, who was so unfairly tried. Her cheek glowed as she turned and said—

"No, no; we must do what we can for you. I won't desert you. So come and show me your curiosities."

She was bewildered with the treasures that he exhibited; and he illustrated them so agreeably, with such a pleasant commentary, that an hour slipped away. No Mrs. Massinger came, however; for though Mr. Romaine had indeed received a note from her, he had written one in reply, pleading business for that

evening, but fixing the same hour for the next day. How he talked, and almost bewailed the miserable state of his soul—a kind of wreck now—while Mrs. Fermor listened with a sort of devotion to the curious scraps and hints, patches of his life, which he allowed to escape him carelessly, as it were, and which had for her young soul an unavoidable interest—may be conceived.

"This is so good of you," he said; "so kind, so thoughtful. Is it profane or disrespectful to say that you have been my guardian angel? When I see you there before me, or rather, when I *think* of your advice (is it not absurd almost, I that have rubbed through the world, the wise and experienced man, wanting advice!), I feel so strong. But of course I cannot hope for more. Still, for what is past, accept my most grateful thanks, Mrs. Fermor."

She, thinking herself a perfect little monument of wisdom, shook her finger at him. "It all depends," she said, "on how you behave."

Driving away, at first she was in a sort of elation; then fell into some little misgivings and troubles. Why had not Miss Manuel and the other lady come too? She thought of her then as of a dear friend, and indeed her heart had lately been turning to Pauline with almost a sort of affection and yearning. She was so splendid and brilliant, she admired her, and she was so kind and encouraging. She thought she would go and see her, and tell her her little troubles; then bade the coachman drive away to Alfred-place.

At the door of the house was standing a sober practical brougham; and a sober practical figure was letting himself out slowly, and shutting the door behind him leisurely, as though it were the leaf of a wardrobe. He went up the steps sharply, and rang the bell sharply, as who should say, "An hour contains sixty guineas, not sixty minutes."

Mrs. Fermor knew him to be a doctor. They told her at the door that Miss Manuel had been taken ill that morning, and was in a raging fever.

She had been so full of little schemes for confidence, for consultation, for kind sympathy towards this friend, whom she had determined to make a cherished inmate of, and love, and honour, that the news came on her like a blow. It roused up all the enthusiasm of her young heart. "I will go in," she said. "I will go up to her. Oh, this is dreadful! Where is the room?"

Half way up the stairs, she met a dark figure with black beard and gleaming eyes, who barred her passage. "I am sorry," he said, "we cannot see you. My sister is seriously ill. Another time."

"But," said she, almost piteously, "I am her friend. I want to see her. I am Mrs. Fermor, tell her."

He started forward; his eyes flashed. "You Mrs. Fermor!" he said. "Not a step, please! I must request you will go. She is ill, and half unconscious: so I am master here now. A pleasant surprise for her, indeed! You must go away, and go home, and I must beg you won't come here again."

Really frightened and overpowered, Mrs. Fermor hurried down-stairs. The gleaming eyes, and a sort of restrained ferocity in his manner, scared her. She went home full of grief and confusion. "She has no one to help her," she thought. "Only a woman like me could be her nurse." And Mrs. Fermor, full of enthusiasm and excitement, longed to be a sort of hospital nurse.

On the next evening, Mr. Romaine came stalking into the room. This visit she did not relish; at least, its boldness alarmed her. She tried to assume a little cold manner, but he was so earnest and eager that she put it aside at once.

"You have heard," he said, "about our friend Miss Manuel. It is dreadful, poor, poor girl."

"But is she better?" said Mrs. Fermor, wistfully.

"She is in danger," said he, "serious danger. She has worked herself into this fit, and of course all her fine friends will fly the house like a plague."

Mrs. Fermor clasped her hands fervently. "Indeed, I tried yesterday," she said, "to get to her. I feel for her. I hardly slept last night thinking of her. But there was a terrible man there, who turned me away."

"I know," said he; "that was her brother."

"I would give the world," she went on, "to get to see her, to watch over her, to sit up with her at nights, and be like a Sister of Charity to her."

"You would?" he said, with great interest. "Are you serious? There is a good deal of the theatre and poetry about 'watching' and vigils, &c., which may, perhaps, be leading you astray."

A little wounded, Mrs. Fermor looked at him sadly, without speaking.

"No, no," he said, "I am only joking. That rough speech

was not meant for *you*. I believe in you—a little. But if you are in earnest, come with me now!"

"Come with *you*?" she said, wondering.

"Yes," he said, smiling, "I am a sort of gnome, or genii. I can unlock doors and get into houses by mysterious agency. Will you come? But no! Prudery has its claims, even on an occasion like this. She is the Moloch of our day."

Mrs. Fermor's eyes sparkled. She seemed to feel a holy sort of call. The devotion of the Sister of Charity was before her eyes. "I will go," she said, "and I will trust you."

She set off with Mr. Romaine. She was actually proud of her superiority to the conventional laws.

"I admire you," said Romaine, looking at her steadily, "for the way you have done this. I do indeed. No fuss, no confusion, but practical action. I begin to believe there is some good in the world after all—and some sense."

They went in, up-stairs into the drawing-room. A gentleman in black was waiting there, a tall and sorrowful-looking gentleman. Romaine nodded to him. "How d'ye do, Hanbury?" he said, and left the room.

Mrs. Fermor drooped her head a little guiltily. Hanbury looked at her sadly, and for a moment or two silently. "So you are Fermor's wife!" he said. She often thought afterwards of the sad, hopeless, and wistful look, with which he said these words. It was a little epitome of a whole history, that began with her own coming to Eastport.

Romaine came back in a few minutes. "I have seen Manuel," he said. "He has a good deal of the mule in him, but I have made him do what I like, as I do with most people," and he looked at her for a moment significantly. "Now," he continued, "you may come when you please, and stay as long as you please."

Mrs. Fermor's face glowed with a sense of grateful obligation for this service. This power of "doing," and compassing what seems difficult, is what excites the *true* reverence of women. The "almighty" man is *their* hero.

There was a soft and vital enthusiasm about her, even in little things, which was very interesting to others. She was full of quick, eager affections, and a kind of romance, and threw herself into the new duty she had chosen with an ardour and earnestness that was surprising. The brother received her gloomily, and with distrust. He was, indeed, something of a mule.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-FOURTH.

A NIGHT SCENE.

MISS MANUEL was tossing in a sort of fever. "Over-excitement," said the doctor, a calm, wooden man, who, with a steady attachment for the house, came twice in the day, and twice in the day let himself out of the one-horse wardrobe at the door. He was not a gloomy man, and used to stand for several minutes by Pauline's bedside, studying her flushed face and her eyes—brighter than ever they were before—with unrestrained approbation.

"Nothing *could* be better," he would say to Mrs. Fermor, watching him wistfully, and whose heart would leap at this joyful news; "nothing *could* be better. We shall have the worst symptoms by to-morrow. Pulse not yet high enough, blood abnormal, and a little wandering of the brain. I should say by to-morrow at the furthest. I should like an oppression of the chest, a difficulty of breathing; but," he added, with a sigh, as if illustrating the unreasonableness of our nature, "we can't expect *everything*. Still, nothing *could* be better."

And Mrs. Fermor, wondering, and mystified and overwhelmed with deepest grief at this awful language, could only go through the usual farewell medical offices with anything but the delicacy which custom exacts. Pauline was really in danger for a few days. The doctor was right, though he put it in an odd way, when he wished for the crisis and the more dangerous symptoms to pass by. The excitement in which she had been living, the strain upon her life for so long, had begun to break her down, and she was now tossing and working in the hot fiery waters of fever.

Mrs. Fermor was a perfect Sister of Charity. She sat by her all day, and was really useful. But she longed to be able to show yet greater devotion. She would like to sit up with her all night long—a duty taken by a professional lady. But the brother came pitilessly and roughly in the evening, and turned her away.

She spoke to Mr. Romaine. "I would give the world," she said, "if you could manage it."

"What can I do?" he said. "I am only a rude rough being, without power of any sort. However, we will try." That evening, he came to her at Miss Manuel's with good news.

"I have seen the man," he said. "We had rather a struggle, but I managed him."

Again Mrs. Fermor was suffused with gratitude. She had the greatest confidence and a sort of trusting admiration for this all-powerful man. She was going home in a flurry of delight. It was raining, and there were no cabs. He said, carelessly, "But how am I to get home?"

Still grateful, Mrs. Fermor said, proudly, "I wish I could take you home. But——"

He was a *true* friend, and she was almost a little proud to show to the world that in the instance of so true a friend she could be above its vile conventionalities.

"The old song and the old tune," he said, with what appeared to her real bitterness and wounded feeling. "I suppose, if we were wrecked together on some wretched island, we should be hearing about chaperons, and the other miserable proprieties. Of course *you* can't help it—you only follow the crowd. They would tear you in pieces—you know they would!"

The little lady was delighted. She felt a glow of honest sympathy. "What would you say," she said, "if I did not care for the crowd and their tearing in pieces?"

"I don't believe it," he said, sadly.

"Get in," she said, triumphantly. "You deserve to go home in the rain—but I know you mean well——"

Mr. Romaine, after helping Mrs. Fermor in, had his own foot on the carriage step, when Fermor, with an angry face, came up. Romaine welcomed him with a cordial smile.

"Just putting Mrs. Fermor into her carriage to send her home to you. You are just in time."

Fermor suspiciously answered, "Indeed! it seems so!"

"Ay, so it does!" said Romaine. "Why don't you offer me a seat, Mrs. Fermor?" he added, fixing his eye upon her.

"Oh," she said, hastily, "offer you a seat! You know——"

"Why, I ask? Come?" said Romaine.

He seemed to put this question purposely for some test of his own. Mrs. Fermor coloured a shade, hesitated, and then said, with a little forced manner—

"Well, we *shall* ask you. You must not think of walking. Where shall we set you down?"

The test, whatever it was, was successful; for Mr. Romaine smiled triumphantly. He took off his hat.

"No," he said, "I should only crowd you. Good-bye. Good-bye, Fermor."

Fermor looked after him sourly. He disliked him, and his presence at *that* house; yet, of all the men whom he had ever known, this one alone seemed to intimidate him.

"I should only crowd you too," he said, with a bow to Mrs. Fermor. "Don't let me interfere with your arrangements."

Mrs. Fermor was just saying, "But, Charles, Charles! I want to explain——" when he turned and walked away. She threw herself back, and bit her red lips. "Very well," she said. "Let him go! I wish I had told him openly that I had asked Mr. Romaine in. Why should I not? I am not a child, and if *he* treats me this way——"

She drove home, and came again that night for her first vigil. She was in a tremor of excitement. A great business was before her. She had dressed herself for the task, and got lamps, books, fire, arm-chair, everything, ready with earnest preparation. By ten or eleven she was sitting there alone—the attendant with the curled volutes had resigned, wounded, not to say angry—a little faithful sentry, with bright wakeful eyes, in an arm-chair sentry-box. She was determined not to sleep on her post. Pauline was tossing there beside her. The crisis the medical visitor had wished for was at hand; but presently she became quiet and seemed to sleep. Joy and hope filled Mrs. Fermor's heart. Her trust and affection had increased with her attendance. She had never read the "wicked" Laurence Sterne, or she might have seen in his gay *Sentimental Travels* that "You take a withering twig and put it in the ground; and then you water it, because you have planted it." But Mr. Romaine had lent her a transcendental French romance, called "*L'Amour Spirituel*." (Alas! did she not occasionally lift her eyes ruefully, and strain them backwards to the days of "*Roger le Garçon?*") And this was so dreary and "spiritual" in its sense of the peculiar relations of those who loved each other all through its pages, that the long-lashed eyelids began to droop, and by one o'clock the sentry was sleeping soundly on her post.

She woke up suddenly, startled by the sound of some one talking. There was Pauline, sitting half up in her bed, her long rich hair down over her shoulders like a veil, her eyes flashing like glowing coals, and her arms beating back the curtains beside her. In terror, Mrs. Fermor half ran towards the door—then came back—thinking how late it was, and tried to soothe her. The glowing eyes fixed themselves suddenly on her. The fingers pointed at her trembling.

"Send for her," said Pauline; "quick—send for her, and see—when she comes, keep her until I come down to her."

"Send for whom?" said Mrs. Fermor, soothing her. "For whom, darling? Lie down, do, dearest—there."

"Keep her!" said Pauline, struggling, "until I come down to her. I wish to settle with her—and with them all. But with her and her husband first."

A little terrified, again she tried to soothe her. "Do lie down," she said; "you must, indeed."

"I must tell you," said Pauline, confidentially. "*They* don't suspect—and she, the wife, actually thinks I have a sort of affection for her." And Pauline laughed.

Greatly alarmed, Mrs. Fermor let her go, and shrunk away. "But who do you mean?" she said.

"Fermor—the Fermors," she said, mournfully; "he who destroyed her—our Violet—put her to death with his own hands—took away her sweet life. Was it not a cruel and most dreadful murder? Was it not? And yet they hang people every day. But listen to me. I can tell you something. We are on their track—his and his wife's."

"But what harm has *she* done you?" said the other.

"Harm!" said Pauline, with a half shriek. "Who are you that ask me? Come closer. I can tell you," added Pauline, slowly and doubtfully, "there is something about *you* very like her! Ah!" she said, again beating the curtains, "she is not far off! Send her to me quick, or I shall get up and find her myself."

Dreadfully shocked and terrified, Mrs. Fermor ran to the bell and rang it. In a very short time the brother and some of the servants were in the room. But Mrs. Fermor did not watch again.

The doctor was right. The crisis had come and was past. Pauline began to recover. In three weeks, he said, rubbing his hands, "We are gaining strength, eh?" And certainly, accepting that community of expression, it must be said there was a sort of strength in which *he* had gained sensibly since the commencement of her illness. Later on he said, "I don't see why we should not be kept up by the strongest beef-tea and generous port wine?" Later on still, he said, "I think we shall do—we are pretty sure to do;" and, accepting the community of the expression as before, it must be said that he had done very well indeed.

He had said, "We might be got down for an hour or two to

the drawing-room, but mind, we mustn't over-do it;" and Pauline, in consequence, had come down, and was sitting in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-FIFTH.

AN EXPEDITION.

WHEN Miss Manuel was recovered or convalescent, some letters which she asked for eagerly were brought to her. She picked out three with the Beaumaris postmark—three in the handwriting of Young Brett—and opened them eagerly. They were in the shape of a sort of journal, and full of details. The honest youth, not very fluent with his pen, had sat up many nights writing everything with a fulness that he thought would give pleasure. He had gone into the work with enthusiasm, and what follows is a short history of his adventures.

It had been a wintry journey down to Bangor. At Bangor he got on board a sail ferry-boat, and made a stormy passage across with a "stiff" breeze, shipping seas every moment. "There is a long pier of wood," wrote Young Brett, "more like a plank than a pier, by Jove!" (even in writing he could not keep clear of his favourite god), "and the wind was blowing so hard, and there was no rail to hold on by, and the sea was washing over your feet. I give you my honour, Miss Manuel, this thing was a quarter of a mile long. I never saw such fun! There was an old Welsh clergyman's hat that was caught by the wind, and went flying away like a bird. I could have laughed, only the poor old soul looked so distressed. And *you* would have laughed, Miss Manuel, to have seen us all tottering along that plank, some of us screaming, some of us laughing, and some of us stopping short altogether, and afraid to go back or forwards. There was a young woman, too, with children and baskets, and she was dreadfully embarrassed between the baskets and the children. Just as we were half-way across, and close to the pier, I heard a scream in front, and I saw a little child in a red cloak fall half over the edge of the plank, and there was a wave coming, and the wind blowing," &c.

Young Brett went on to say that he caught hold of the child by the hand, just as if he had stooped down to lift up any child

that had tumbled on the gravel in a square. But the truth was, he had jumped forward along the edge of the slippery "stage," shot past a man who was in front of him, and with much danger and a thorough wetting had caught hold of this little child. He raised her up, and carried her carefully and tenderly all the rest of the journey. The boat went "swirling" through the water, shipping a sea now and again, to his great delight; but he had the red-cloaked little girl on his knee all the time, and laughed for her, which she could understand, and talked English for her, which she could not, and finally set her down on dry land.

The woman—a handsome young Welshwoman—was deeply grateful; not so much for the little service, for which she would have nodded her thanks to one of her own station, but for Young Brett's manner, which caused the feeling of every one he came in contact with to take *some* shape of affection, slight or strong. It was so with the cabman who took him but two streets away; with the porter who carried his portmanteau from the train to the cab; with the people who got in at one station and got out in ten minutes. Every one felt that he was good, and this young Welshwoman had the same feeling.

Landing, he with great delight got into one of the light carriages drawn by a pair of donkeys, and drove away gaily to Beaumaris. "I really felt ashamed," he wrote, "to see myself drawn by the little creatures, but the boy who drove gave me their biography at length, and seemed quite fond of them. Besides, they were very strong, and we trundled along quite cheerfully. But I was thinking if Showers, or Slack, or any of our fellows had seen me! Luckily it was dark."

Most Welsh travellers have seen the little old-fashioned, dun-coloured, remote, unfriended, pocket town called Beaumaris, which we come to along the river, and which we see jutting out before us into the water, with a sort of sham air of a tiny fortified town, with a dull resemblance to a miniature Ostend. The little dun High-street, through which no carriages travel, and whose little dun houses seem toy-houses; the general air as if the streets were diligently swept up every morning like a hearth; and the quiet slumber that reigned over the men and women, and the lone common at the edge of the sea, contributed to make rather a dispiriting impression on Young Brett as he entered triumphantly drawn by his donkeys. It was all out of the season, it being the depth of winter. The little town seemed to be laid up in ordinary, stripped, unfurnished, like a

ship out of commission. Young Brett drove to the hotel of the place, and was received with a little surprise. The rooms had a mouldy air; but he was made welcome. To one of his temper these were dispiriting influences, but he manfully struggled against them, and kept thinking of the friend whose mission he had come down to fulfil. Later, he was sitting at some dinner in the coffee-room, when a gentleman, rubbing his hands together softly, came gliding in. "God bless me!" said Young Brett, starting up; "Major Carter, what do *you* do here?"

"Well, of all the coincidences in the world, my young friend!" said the major, casting up his eyes devoutly. "It looks like a providence, that we two, of all men in the world, and here, of all places in the world——"

"I don't know about the coincidence," said Young Brett, bluntly. "I don't understand it."

"This was my home for a long time," said the major. "I had good reason, unhappily, to connect me with this place. I ought to remember it. You may be sure it is no pleasure to me to revisit it. But now let me ask you, my young friend, what brings *you* down here, eh?"

"Business," he said, without hesitation. "Welsh business, major. Travelling makes one hungry, as you see."

"Welsh business?" said the major, slowly, and looking at him steadily. "For a friend, I suppose, not for yourself?"

"Common, every-day sort of thing," said Young Brett, helping himself. "A little confidential; you understand. Otherwise——"

"I dare say, now," said Major Carter, looking at him still, "where it was a lady who could not herself so conveniently travel, and who had a smart, handy, enthusiastic young fellow she could send in her stead, to use his eyes and pry about, and pick up facts to try and slander and ruin a man who has never done *him* any harm, eh? *That's* an honourable and a gentlemanly duty to be employed on. Eh, Mr. Brett?"

Young Brett coloured. "I don't understand; that is, I *do* understand," he added, hastily.

"As I say," continued the major, "you are a gentleman, and have always been above dirty work. Your friend, Miss Manuel, hates me, and you know why. Because I interfered to save a friend from a match that I considered was unsuited for him. He would have embittered the life of that poor girl. She would have been in her grave now; you know she would. The girl that he has married he is making wretched. And for this.

Miss Manuel has marked me; I know it; she is determined to harass me in every way she can. I could not believe such vindictiveness in a Christian lady. I say it is shocking."

Young Brett's cheeks kindled. "Do you speak of Miss Manuel?" he said. "Those words do *not* apply to her; to her least of any one in the world. I can't sit by, Major Carter, and have her so spoken of; I will not, indeed. She is above all that—miles above it. If ever," continued Young Brett, with a trembling voice, "there was a woman noble, and generous, and *devoted* on this earth, it is she!"

"I know she has a friend in you," answered the major, quickly, "and your defence of her is honourable to you. But tell me this: Is it noble or generous to lead astray a young girl—a young wife—to put her in the power of a cold, scheming man of the world—hand *her* over to him—urge *him* on—all to punish the man who left her sister? Just watch for yourself. Is this devoted or noble? I declare—and I don't set up to be squeamish—it seems to me devilish."

Greatly excited, Young Brett said, "If you mean this to apply to Miss Manuel, in her name I deny it altogether. I could not believe that you could mean to utter such horrible slanders. I won't have them—I won't hear them, Major Carter."

"Good," said the major. "We will say no more about it, as you desire it. Your warmth does you honour. Of course it is excusable in *her*: she loved her sister; but I implore of you reflect a moment before you go on. I have had troubles enough in my life, and want to end my days peaceably. Good God!" continued the major, walking up and down, "it is awful to think of. That any woman should venture on so terrible a track—and, my dear boy, I don't think you know the full force of what you are required to do."

Young Brett looked at him wondering, and still in distress. He had some qualms of conscience, and the picture of the old soldier buffeting wearily through life, and wishing to end his days in calm, affected him a little.

"Are you staying in this house?"

"I have to go up by the night train," answered the major. "I had some business here too. I daresay you'll find it out before you go. Lucky fellow you! You will have a comfortable bed here, and a comfortable sleep. A capital house. I know it of old. Think of the poor traveller tumbling on the cushions, as you turn round on your side to go off into a com-

fortable snooze. You are not angry with me? Advice from a man of the world, and from an old man of the world, is always useful. Good-bye."

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-SIXTH

YOUNG BRETT'S DISCOVERIES.

STILL under the impression that his office was a little "shabby," Young Brett had to reassure himself pretty often. Was not all that Miss Manuel wished, to hear how a quiet lady died? He spoke to a waiter that night about Major Carter. An admirable gentleman, said the waiter, known and much liked in the place. They were all sorry when he left. He was so gay and cheerful, and could tell such nice stories. And Mrs. Carter? A good woman, too, but "soft" and quiet—by no means to come near the major. What did she die of? Oh, ill for a long time; regular break up. Began with a cold. In fact, only for the major, who took such care, and sat up and slaved himself night after night, she would have been dead months before. A good charitable man—gay and pleasant, too. (As if the charitable were not usually gifted with these qualities.) Where did he live, and the lady die? At Griffiths's, in the main street.

In the morning he saw the little dun town better, its tiny street, its house or two, whose second story projected over on pillars, and made a sort of summer-house below. He found that his hotel had one front which looked into the little main street, and another, heavy, massive, and of a chilling iron-grey, that made part of a terrace, and looked out across a little common upon the sea. This was now a cheerless prospect; and the iron-grey face was as rough and well scored with ill usage from the weather, as that of an old storm-beaten pilot.

He set off to Griffiths's. There were miniature shops, where they seemed to sell nothing but glass pickle-bottles full of sweets and lozenges, and in which articles a brisk trade must have been done. He found his way to a narrow yellow strip of a house, in the front bedroom of which Mrs. Carter had died. He knocked. It was opened by a tall bony woman. She stood with it half open, so that her figure, with the door, made up a

perfect and satisfactory obstruction. Young Brett said cheerfully that he wished to see Mrs. Griffiths.

"About what?" said the other, sharply. "On what?"

"Well," said Young Brett, "about lodgings."

"There are no lodgings to let here, nor won't be," said the woman, preparing to close the door.

"But," said Young Brett, "I want to see Mrs. Griffiths."

"Well, what o' that?" said the woman, yet more sharply.

"I tell you we let no lodgings, and won't let them."

Brett, still good humoured and never to be put out of temper, said this was provoking, and that it couldn't be helped. That he was a stranger in the place, and could he—this he put at a venture—see Mr. Griffiths?

"No you can't—no, nor him neither," she said, not so sharply now. "We don't waste our time in this place; and you, young man, don't waste yours."

"You won't let me in, that's evident," said Young Brett, laughing.

"What is it?" said a voice behind the woman, and a hard-lined face, that had been in the world some sixty years, appeared on the shoulder of the woman. Said the woman: "He wants lodgings. Only think! Why, there's the hotel!"

The sixty years' face had sharp eyes and ragged hair. The sharp eyes twinkled. "Lodgings," it said. "Well, we might, you know. It ain't our custom. But if a good thing offered——"

The woman turned on him. "Always for money," she said, wickedly. "You would sell your soul, and all our souls, for a tester. I tell you no."

"And *you* think money is to be picked up in the street," he said. "Here is a gentleman who will make us a good offer, I know he will. And it is hard, precious hard—in my own house, too."

"Ah, go in," she said, with a rough good humour. "Don't let us be exposing our fights in the street. It can't be done," she said to Brett. "Very sorry not to have you, sir. But we don't like to put ourselves out. And I have a hundred things to do; so——" She closed the door, making *it* finish what she was saying.

Young Brett went his way a little gloomy. "I can do no more," he thought, "if they *won't* let me in, or tell me anything." But he felt a little ashamed of coming back to Miss Manuel so unsuccessful. So he set off to take a walk in the grounds of the old castle next the town.

Some one "showed" it to him; i.e. received a shilling. And Brett was walking briskly about to warm himself, when he came suddenly on a woman with two children. He recollected the woman at once.

"Oh, sir," she said, "I came to look for you. I heard a gentleman had been at our house, and I was sure it was the same."

"What, at Griffiths's?" said Young Brett. "And this is the little woman that nearly fell into the water? You must take care another time, little woman." He doted on children, and most children that he met were seen "toddling" to him with their little hands extended. This little child of the red cloak he stooped down and kissed. The mother looked at him with beaming eyes. She was young and fresh, and had a soft interest in her face.

"Oh, indeed, sir," she said, "we are so grateful to you. And you thought so little of it."

"Nonsense," said Young Brett, colouring, as he always did at praise. "You make me uncomfortable. So you were at Griffiths's?"

"I am their daughter-in-law," said she, "and live with them. My husband is dead. That little one there was his favourite."

"Nice little woman!" Brett took her up, and put her on his shoulder. "What does she like? Go-carts and dolls, and Noah's arks? I suppose they sell those sort of things somewhere?"

"O no, no, sir; you are too kind. But," she went on, with some hesitation, "you wanted lodgings, you said."

"Why—er—no, not exactly," said Young Brett, setting the little girl down. "I wanted to—see somebody—or to hear something—you know—more than the lodgings. Wasn't there a Mrs. Carter staying with you?"

The woman looked round with alarm. "Ah, I thought it was that," she said.

"Why?" said Young Brett, wondering.

"You wished to hear about *all* that. And I have been expecting it this long time back."

"Then I dare say *you* know all about it," said he, eagerly; "that is, if there is anything to know."

She shook her head. "Something—not much. It is a long story, and a sad story, and a curious story, sir. If you wish to learn it all, you should stay here some time, and see people who ought to be seen. You should take our lodgings."

Young Brett looked at her astonished. "This is all mysterious," he said. "I *did* want to take your lodgings, but they won't let me take them."

"Oh, they will," she said. "He will. He is moaning over the loss of so much money at this very moment. If you come again, sir, in the morning——"

"But," said he, "this is all so odd; and if I were to go to your house, I don't know—I ought to be back in London."

"Some one should look to it," the young woman said.

"It? What?" echoed Young Brett.

"Her illness," said she, mysteriously. "It was very long, and very miserable, and——"

"How did she die?" said Young Brett, eagerly.

She shook her head. "I was kept away—shut out. Poor gentle lady, she fancied me a little, and somehow *he* took care always not to let me near her. He suspected me."

"Suspected!" said Young Brett, a little bewildered. "Suspected what?—and why should he suspect?"

The young woman shook her head and looked round. "*He* himself has been here, at our house. He knew that some one was coming, and told *them*. He has great influence with Mrs. Griffiths. But I say," she went on, with greater vehemence, "some one should look after it! You should stay here some days. There are people to be seen that know a great deal. I can tell nothing, because I know but little; but you are clever, and can use your eyes and head."

"Who am I to see?" said Young Brett.

They talked some time longer, and she told him—then went away.

There was a dingy apothecary's shop there, languid as regards business; its bottles, medicines, and apparatus appearing under a delicate film of blue mould. The dispenser himself, as seen through a dusty pane, seemed to be suffering under the same powdery mite-eaten blight.

Young Brett walked into the shop briskly, and asked to see Doctor Jones. A boy came out from behind the dusty glass door of a back parlour, with hope in his face; but Young Brett, fresh, clean, and full of bright health, quickly dissipated all illusion. The boy's face fell. Doctor Jones appeared presently, a stooping, grey-haired, trembling old man, with a face of crushed and crumpled parchment. It was turned very shyly and suspiciously on the young officer. With his off-hand way, Young Brett said he wanted a box of cough lozenges. He did not say

for a cough. Some such old fossils were discovered in a pigeon-hole and given to him. Then he began to talk pleasantly with the old man about the place, and about those who lived there.

There was a fire in the back parlour, and Doctor Jones, shivering a good deal, asked, "Would he come in and sit down?" Brett went in gladly, and had soon, with his usual charm, recommended himself. Gradually he came to the subject that was in his mind, and mentioned the name of Major Carter.

The old man started back, and looked at him steadfastly, with his hands clasping the knobs of his chair. "Why do you mention *him*?" he said, quickly. "What do you want to know?"

"I?" said Young Brett. "I know him already—have known him ever so long. I knew his wife, too, poor lady!"

Old Doctor Jones squeezed his eyes to look yet more suspiciously at his visitor. "Why do you talk to *me* about her?" he said. "It is all so long ago: it is better to let the whole thing be forgotten. I don't want to think of it. That is—if I was to be thinking of all the people I have attended, and what they suffered, what pleasant thoughts and pleasant dreams I should have!"

"So *you* attended Mrs. Carter?" said Young Brett, with blunt interest. "I want to hear about that illness. I am most anxious to know all about poor Mrs. Carter, and how she——"

Suddenly the dirty glass door was opened by a fresh, pink-looking, red-haired young man, with quick eyes, who stood with his hand on the door looking from one to the other. "Mrs. Carter's illness!" he said. "Well, what about it? She was ill, and she died, and was buried, like a thousand other people. Who is this gentleman, father?"

Young Brett answered promptly that they were merely talking over the town and the people who had lived there.

"Oh," said the young man, with a half smile; "that was all, was it? How singular! I am Doctor Watkyn Jones. I carry on the business. He is not able to go about and do the visiting. Father, you had better go up-stairs; there is a better fire there." He held the door with a quiet look that seemed to amount to an order. Trembling and looking on the ground with his parchment face, the old man tottered away. As soon as he was gone, the other sat down at the table, and began to talk with great frankness. "I know what this is about, sir," he said, "perfectly well. The insurance people have had persons down here poking and prying about, trying to get up suspicions against honest folk. It is always their game. As far as I am con-

cerned, I am determined they shall have no help; nor from any one belonging to me. Every honest man must set his face against such proceedings."

He spoke this so warmly, that Young Brett felt with him. "I assure you," he said, "I have nothing to do with the insurance people—never heard of them, in fact."

"I hope you did not understand me so?" said the other. "I have known Major Carter a long time. He is an honourable man, not rich, but wishing to do all that is right and respectable. You will hear nothing but good of him in this place."

"Well, certainly," said Young Brett, "so far I have indeed——"

"But he has enemies," continued the other. "I know he has. There is one family up in London whom he has offended, and who are literally hunting him, for some fancied injury that they think he did to them. I know, sir, on good authority, instances of this persecution that would amaze you!"

Young Brett, a little confused and guilty, felt himself colouring all over.

"I know this myself. This insurance business was all got up by them. The company were going to pay, and a lady of this family went to the manager, and put it all into their heads. Only conceive such a thing, sir!"

Young Brett was indeed a little shocked and ashamed. Miss Manuel's inquiries about the Irrefragable all flashed upon him.

"No, sir," said Doctor Watkyn Jones, confidentially drawing his chair closer, "you are a gentleman, and I shall make no secrets with *you*. When these insurance people came with their mean, sneaking, hole-and-corner inquiries, we met them openly, and sent them back to their London office without a scrap of information. If you care, I shall tell you the whole thing."

Young Brett said eagerly that he would like nothing so much; and for nearly two hours—during which time not a single patient disturbed them—Doctor Watkyn Jones told him the story of Mrs. Carter's happy end, which was without pain, and in perfect peace. On Young Brett it left an impression of a very touching scene, and almost satisfied his honest heart. He had done the duty he had undertaken, and was delighted to find that it was to be a very small duty after all. Coming away light hearted, and with general esteem for the local practitioner, he gaily passed to his hotel, then wrote a long letter to Miss Manuel, and took an evening train across country to his regiment.

"I think," he wrote, "it has all turned out very well, and I

begin to think myself quite a clever diplomatist. Do you not feel for poor Mrs. Carter? She was a good creature, and I am glad to think died so happily and with such comforts round her. Old Carter, you see, is not so bad, and with more heart than we fancied. I am sure you will be glad to hear this, and I lose not a moment in letting you know."

Young Brett, however, did not see the inconsistency between his earlier letters, describing what he had gathered from the young woman in the castle grounds, and his last. Miss Manuel did, and smiled to herself. "Poor honest boy!" she said; "he is too trusting and open to deal with people of this sort. I ought to have foreseen this from the beginning; *now* I must act for myself."

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-SEVENTH.

MISS MANUEL ON THE TRACK.

SEEN in the park, waiting on his Mrs. Wrigley, Major Carter's face seemed to have recovered its old clear brilliance. There was triumph in his eye. At last he was walking on the mosses of life, and he found it very grateful for his feet, a good deal blistered with stony travel. Things were going well with him. He had suffered friendly and complimentary delving in the ribs from cheerful acquaintances, together with the sly wink of encouragement, and the knowing, "*I see, Carter, my boy!*" Mrs. Wrigley's face, too, wore the fat bovine smile of conquest. At her time of life such victories are welcome. Punsher Hill and Hoblush found themselves drifting away farther and yet farther every day, and made desperate efforts. Major Carter, too, had triumphed in another recent affair, and knew for certain that Young Brett's expedition had failed—failed hopelessly. It was indeed likely that, in a contest with a simple child, he should prevail. "Poor Miss Manuel!" he said, at the window of Mrs. Wrigley's ancient chariot, playing all his veteran coquetries, "she is recovering slowly, I hear; we shall not see her for weeks yet. Between ourselves, my dear Mrs. Wrigley, she tries too much—far too much. I don't like your manly women, ha, ha! No; when you are soft, and gentle, and feminine, and tender, and even

helpless, my dear Mrs. Wrigley," and here the ancient chariot swung heavily with a sort of jerk, in acknowledgment of the compliment, "you make us your slaves." And the voice of the major dropped suddenly into a low, sweet, and meaning key.

But, at that very moment of success and happiness, there was another scene going on down at the little Welsh town, which, had he known of, would have turned the major's well-trained cheeks quite pale.

Miss Manuel had decided on her course promptly. She took up the thread where good foolish Young Brett had dropped it. The gloomy brother wondered why she was getting her things together, and where she could be thinking of going at that rough season. He looked on suspiciously, and with roving eyes. "You are getting tired of the work," he said. "In good time you will forget *her*." Miss Manuel's face flushed up with an intelligent look. "Ah, Louis," she said, "how little you know me! I am living but for *that*. And it is for this, and this only, that I go upon this journey to-night." That strange, moody, and injured manner was growing more and more upon him, and he was only half satisfied.

She was to go with her maid, and on that night. All during her illness, Fermor had been at the door, restlessly coming to and fro. He was never allowed to enter. Day by day he had received welcome news of her gradual mending. Soon he heard of her being out, and of her driving about, and came hurriedly. He found a cab at the door, and luggage was being placed on the top. Miss Manuel met him on the steps. "What does this mean?" he repeated. "Going away! Why, you are not fit to travel."

He was struck by the change, and was almost pleased with himself for the romantic and quasi-paternal interest he was showing. She was gay, and in spirits, and laughed.

"What am I going for?" she said; "for a hundred reasons. Perhaps I want change of air—perhaps it is a mere whim—or perhaps I feel that I dare not trust myself here any longer, and that a woman's resolution is growing weaker every day. Is not the one only course to fly? Adieu!"

This speech, had it been written, would have thrown Fermor into a tumult of conceit. But as it was spoken, something scoffing underlaid it. He looked at her with doubt and trouble.

"Do not go," he said; "I want to speak to you. They would not let me in during your illness; and I came day after day. I saw others let in. You should not treat me in this

way. Don't go yet; I have a thousand things to say to you."

Again Miss Manuel laughed. "A thousand things to say to me—at a cab door! You should learn to be more practical in these days of railways. Good-bye."

"But," he said, eagerly, "how long do you stay? Tell me—do. Where shall I write to——"

"Drive on," said she to the servant. "Everything is in, I believe." Then to Fermor—"Well, I believe a month, or six months—or perhaps only a week. It depends. Good-bye."

Fermor stood looking after the cab. This strange treatment chafed him; yet there was something pleasing under all.

Early the next morning, a lady's maid in Beaumaris was asking at the mouldy dispensary where the maid's lady would be likely to find genteel and decent apartments by the week. A delicate lady, newly recovered from sickness, who had been recommended bracing air. This was spoken to a boy behind the counter, who went in with the request to a back parlour, and came out again with an old man. The old man shaded his eyes with his hand, to look well at her. "I don't know," he said, in a trembling voice. "My son Watkyn is away, and he would not like it, perhaps. Still, my dear, Watkyn likes a little money."

"But perhaps you know of some place?" said the lady's maid.

The boy said eagerly that their rooms were about the nicest in the place, and that the best quality came and stayed there. The maid then went away, and said she would report to her mistress.

Later in the day a delicate lady, whose face looked as if it could be very brilliant when in the full colour and flush of health, came into the shop, and the old man came out to her. He shaded his eyes as before, but looked longer and harder than before. Into that dusty region she seemed to bring light, and fragrance, and brilliance. The boy stood helpless with his mouth open. The old man kept muttering, "Good gracious, good gracious!"

"They told me," said Pauline, in her sweet voice, "that you had rooms. If yours are not to let, you might, perhaps, know of others. There would be an advantage, I confess, being only just recovered, in having medical assistance so near."

"Yes, yes," said the old man, hastily; "that is all true. Watkyn is considered clever all round the country, oh, for miles. I am

sure he would not mind ; he ought to like it, indeed he ought. It would be a surprise for him when he comes back. Heaven send we may all die in our beds !" Which odd speech, muttered to himself in a reverie, made Miss Manuel and the boy start. He started himself, and looked round nervously.

The rooms were taken. Before the day was out it went through the town, where there was a perfect drought of news, that a "fine" lady had come down, and was staying at "th' ould doctor's." Later, too, the fine lady was seen herself, walking about, in the green ; and she spoke to the children playing there, and found out a little girl in a red cloak. For the little girl in the red cloak soon came a fresh and handsome young woman, and with the fresh and handsome young woman Miss Manuel began to talk.

The doctor's lodgings were clean and bright enough. They had a bow-window, and muslin curtains in the bow-window, and would have been very bright and encouraging apartments, but for a dreadful male portrait or two, done in rich tea-board colouring, which, clad in inflexible coats, with high collars apparently cut out of the hardest wood, and suggesting horrible associations of discomfort for the wearer, looked down with a mournful ferocity on the tenants as they sat at tea. That night the doctor's son came home, and started as he saw a great box of Miss Manuel's in the hall. She heard his voice below, putting all manner of inquiries, half angrily, half suspiciously. Very soon he was up in the drawing-room, on the pretext of seeing that all was comfortable.

This pink Welshman, so free of speech, talked gaily with Miss Manuel, who presently set him quite at ease. One of her charms, which she could assume when she pleased, was a helplessness of manner, with a sense of finding strength and support in the person she was talking with. He was at first curious, hinting questions as to where she came from, and how long was she going to stay, and why, of all places in the world, she selected that cold bleak corner to repair her health in. Pauline scorned a falsehood, or even a semblance of one ; but somehow a misty idea was left upon his mind that some one, say some visitor, had spoken of the superior medical advice to be found in the little town. He told her by-and-by all about himself, for she showed great interest in such personal details ; how his practice was increasing, how he soon expected to have the whole business of the place, and of the country round. He was making great way.

Said Miss Manuel, quickly—"And you have not long succeeded your father? He was practising last year, was he not?"

The other looked at her suspiciously. "Well, yes," he said. "But how did you know? *That* news did not fly up to London."

"Oh, I have heard a good deal since I came—even already," said Miss Manuel, smiling; but he had become doubtful and silent, and as he left the room, cast back a sharp quick searching look at her.

During these days Miss Manuel often went up and down, often went in and out, often looked wistfully at the glass door; but the son was always on quick sharp duty. She never saw that strange nervous old man who sat in the parlour over the fire—that is, could not see him alone, for when she met him, and tried to talk to him, the son stood by and watched jealously with his eye fixed on him. Under which eye old Doctor Jones always grew uneasy.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-EIGHTH.

A STORMY NIGHT.

IT went on, in this fashion, for a week—then for ten days—then for a fortnight. It was a jail-like existence. The lady who visited the watering-place out of the season, and at a cheerless season out of the season, was an inexhaustible source of wonder and speculation to the inhabitants. The town maid, cut off from her circle of friends and acquaintances (when *her* season, too, was rife), began to murmur at heart, to grow reserved, and, later, became charged with lemons and vinegar about her face. Pauline herself was fretting and growing impatient. At last, on the night of a cold miserable day, whose tone had been blue as steel, the sea tumbling sharply and bitterly up the straits, and sharp icy east winds gashing human chests and human eyes like cruel razors, an express came in from a neighbouring squire for young Doctor Watkyn Jones. Doctor Watkyn Jones's stories to Miss Manuel were, indeed, pure fables; he was not often sent for, and a Welshman of grim humour said that his patients were all of the "God reward ye" class. The express from the squire was for the squire's lady—the great country doctor was away, and Watkyn was the

nearest medical man. With the squire's express came a gig to take away Watkyn Jones.

At first he was dazzled and triumphant, and rushed to tell the London maid, who doubted his professional standing. "He was an imposture," she often said to Miss Manuel (thinking she was using the word "impostor"). Then his pink face became overcast. But it was late, ten o'clock, and he asked the London maid had her mistress gone to bed? The London maid, with a toss of her head, said she would be in bed in ten minutes. The triumph of the moment soon shut out every other thought, and he took his place in the gig with pride. "Go to bed, father," he said, sternly, fixing him with his eye; "you sit up too late. It is not good for you. If I had a moment, I should see you in bed before I left."

"Indeed I will," said the old man. "But what a night for me to be left alone! Do you hear the wind? Lord have mercy on us! That we may all die in our beds!"

The son did not wait to hear the last of this speech, but grumbled as he took his place in the gig. "He does not think of *me* out here," he said. The razors were indeed darting about wildly. Miss Manuel up in her room, and just about going to bed, heard the gig wheels and the voices below, and the news of Squire Morgan's wife being ill. She heard, too, the winds growling up the straits sulkily and sourly, as if they were coming up a tunnel. The London maid came in and told her all the details—with great zest, too, for she had now, like other prisoners, began to take interest in things, even like prison spiders or Picciolas. Her mistress listened eagerly.

"Is it far off?" she asked.

"Oh," the maid answered, "he will be away the whole night."

"I shall not go to bed yet," said Miss Manuel. "Don't wait up."

It was an old house, built when the little dun town was struggling out of being a mere village. The wooden bow-window rattled, as if the wind wanted to get in, and was in a fury at being kept waiting. Every one was keeping close, even to the old watchman who managed the "curfew"—for they had their curfew in the little town—and he was snugly sitting in the public-house. Miss Manuel, wrapping a shawl about her, came down-stairs, and saw a light through the glass door of the parlour. She opened it softly.

The old man was looking nervously at the clattering windows,

shrinking away from each gust. He did not hear or see Miss Manuel's entrance. He was saying to himself, in his old formula, "Lord have mercy on us! That we may all die in our beds!" when he looked round suddenly and saw his visitor—that is, a tall flashing woman with a light in her hand—a spirit, surely, or an angel. For a moment he was terror-struck. Miss Manuel began to speak cheerfully to him and with encouragement. But he was scarcely to be reassured.

"What a night!" said she. "It makes one feel quite uncomfortable."

"Ay! what a night," he said. "God Almighty be with us."

"Not a night," said she, "to be sitting alone. We want company, and not to be left to our own thoughts."

"No, indeed," said the old man, looking at her strangely. "and it was odd, wasn't it, that *he* should have been sent for to-night, when—when——"

"When we would like the house to have all its tenants. Yes," she said, "it is odd. Yet it has happened fortunately for me. I wished to speak to you."

"To me!" said the other, starting up. "Why to *me*? What do you want to know?"

Miss Manuel smiled. "How odd, now!" she said. "I never said I wished to know anything. That would be accepted as suspicious elsewhere."

"Suspicious! Who is talking of suspicion?" said the old man, now very agitated.

She fixed her eyes on him. "Why," said she, suddenly—"why is it that your son always watches you so?"

He started. "Watches me? No—he does not."

"Yes, he does," said she, quickly. "I have remarked it. It seems as if *you* had some secret which he was afraid you would disclose."

The look of stupid wonder and confusion the old man gave her, she recollected long afterwards. He could not answer.

"Another question," said Miss Manuel. "Good gracious, what a gale! Did you feel the house rock then? What is the reason that you are always talking of dying in our beds? I have heard you say so many times."

He looked at her now quite scared, and stood up trembling. "Why do you come to me in this way," he said, tossing his hands, "when there is no one in the house? When he is away? And on such a night, Lord deliver us! What do you want?"

You have some dreadful thing in your mind. And—I have said nothing and done nothing.”

She soothed him. “Don’t be alarmed,” she said. “I am very solitary up-stairs. The wind always frightens me. No wonder I should like a little company. You talk of dying in our beds, but think of any poor soul departing on such a night as this—rushing from the world in a storm! Are there any now in Beaumaris, I wonder? I passed a house this very day where there was a lady dying not so very long ago. Griffiths’s they told me it was called.”

The old man was now standing up. “My son was right,” he said; “he told me so. He warned me. He knew it. Ah! you have watched for this opportunity. You have got me here alone and helpless. It is unfair; it is——”

“Hush! hush!” said Pauline, drawing herself up. “You will betray yourself. Suppose that I have? Suppose I have come down to seek and to discover and to bring the guilty to justice—to track out a foul crime? Suppose I *have* watched for, and found an opportunity? Suppose I *have* found you here alone and helpless, as you say; you may bless your stars for it! For it is the only chance that offers to save you from what you dread, and from what I can see is preying on your soul and on your conscience. And that chance is—I tell you openly and plainly—confession!”

He was speechless with terror and astonishment.

“Take care, take care,” she went on, quickly. “You don’t know what is hanging over you. The net is drawing closer every day. There is danger and ruin coming, and coming fast. You can save yourself by helping me. I know more than you think I know. Do you refuse or hesitate? If you dare to tell your son when he returns, I shall go away at once, and let everything take its course. There! Shall I leave you now?”

She took up her light, and stayed a moment with her hand on the door.

At last he found speech. “But I have done nothing. I know nothing. I am so old. I have——”

“No, no,” said she, coming back with a reassuring smile. “Who thinks so? No one. But still you know much, and know much that you can tell. Shall I sit down, or——” And again she laid her hand on the candle.

“But—but—my son—my son,” said he, shaking his hands despairingly; “what will *he* say?”

“What will he say when I go away—when the whole becomes

public—when you are both dragged away as accomplices—when this town, and this principality, and this kingdom are ringing with the news of the cruel business that was done down here?”

“Who are you?” he said, full of terror. “What do you want with me? I am a poor miserable old man, and must die soon. It is cruel. I have no strength. My son would protect me if he were here. I am a miserable creature that would not hurt a fly, and must soon die.”

Pauline started up, and stood before him like a destroying angel. “You *are* old,” she said, “and miserable, and have the long, long days of a long life to count up. You must die soon. Yes, but how? There are other ways than that dying in your bed you are so anxious for. For all your years and all your misery, you may yet be dragged to a shameful end. He who looks on is as guilty as he who does the work.”

The old doctor shrank away from her, and tried to hide himself behind his hands. “Don’t, don’t speak so awfully,” he said, trembling. “I am an old miserable creature who would harm no one.”

Pauline looked down on him for a moment. “Very well,” she said. “Be miserable, then; I have done. On your own head be it. Do as you like: and I leave you now——”

She turned to go. At that moment the wind came with a fresh howl and a fresh fury down the street: there was a crash only a few houses away, as of a chimney hurled down into ruins. Then came silence; and the old man crouched and cowered into his arm-chair, as if it were a cave where he could hide his head. She had her hand on the door, and it opened noisily.

“Don’t—don’t leave me,” he said, piteously. “I shall be destroyed if I am left alone. There, I will tell you all—all that I know.”

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-NINTH.

FOREBODINGS.

MISS MANUEL had returned. She had been at Torquay, or at St. Leonard’s, or at some of those sheltered winter corners where invalids go to find colour and strength. This her world supplanted; her court of writers and “clergymanical”

reviewers, all knew this; and when they made their congratulations on her return, never suspected that her fresh brilliancy was owing to the keen breezes of the little dun town so far away. She returned with all the enthusiasm of triumph.

Mrs. Fermor, full of enthusiasm and young affection, had soon shut out the memory of what she had heard during her night-watch, and came eagerly to welcome her friend back again. She had worked herself into a sort of romantic love for this friend; and though she felt again, when ascending the stairs, something of her old recollections, when she entered she forgot it, and ran forward to embrace her with real affection.

"I am so glad, so delighted, to see you down again," she said, with a sort of punctuation of kissing.

Pauline tried to be cold, but her resolution gave way before the genuine delight of this faithful little woman. Then she turned from her suddenly and sharply, and she called herself (mentally) "She-Judas!"

"I am so glad!" said Mrs. Fermor. "I never discovered until you were ill how much I liked you. I don't know why; we have known each other for so short a time; and I dare say," she added, a little ruefully, for she again thought of what she had heard during the night-watching, "you do not care so much for me?" and she looked at her wistfully.

"Why should you think that?" said Pauline, restlessly. "You know I like you, and *indeed* I feel grateful for all you have done for me. I only learnt to-day how you nursed and watched me. And it has distressed me more than you would suppose. I wanted nobody," and she added, a little vehemently, "and you—not for the world. You might have caught it." But I am indeed grateful." And again she turned sharply, and called herself Judas. "I never thank," she went on earnestly. "They tell me I am cold, and do not feel obligations. So that you will understand—if I should ever appear not to value what you have done as it deserves to be valued, you will set it down to the right cause. Don't judge me too harshly; there may be more behind than you know of. We may not all have our free will."

Deeply mystified at the beseeching manner with which this was said, Mrs. Fermor knew not what to make of it. "I don't know," she said, "but I am sure you will be always kind and good." She added, piteously, "I seem to have no friends now. I have so few to care for me, and those few——" She stopped.

"But your husband," said Miss Manuel, scornfully, "is he not all in all?"

The little lady's little brow contracted. Her eyes fell towards the ground. "I dare say it is my fault," she said. "It may be. I am very young and foolish. Perhaps if I had some one to advise and counsel me, some kind person that understands me, or would try and understand me. I thought of this very often during the night that I was with you. From the very first day I was attracted to you—I felt that *you* would aid and assist me in some difficulty. And now I am sure, if I were to put confidence in you and tell you my little troubles, you, who I *think* are beginning to like me—you who are so good and noble——"

Miss Manuel, who had been listening with eyes fixed on the other, turned hastily and rose. "No, no," she said, "not to me. To any one in the world but me. I am not fit to advise any one. Good and noble! No, no. Wicked, rather! I have no will, no strength. I am a weak, miserable being. Leave me, leave me quick! I am ill still, I believe, and talk absurdly. Leave me now. I shall be better to-morrow."

Mrs. Fermor departed, sad and wondering. When she was gone, Pauline buried her face in the cushions of a sofa, sobbing wildly. "Good God! good God! what am I coming to? What devilish task is this I have plunged into? Destroying the innocent—poisoning the pure! No, no—save me, save me; and spare that poor, gentle, tender, confiding thing!"

She felt a hand upon her shoulder, and she started up. "Whom would you spare?" said her brother, scornfully; "that girl who has just left you? Never, by my soul! never! not while I live! If your hand fails, then is mine ready—far rougher, and far more deadly. So choose. I am growing impatient. It is too long. Ah, Pauline! you treat an oath lightly. Your memory is growing weak. To me it seems but last night, and that our darling Violet is lying in the next room. Come, take a serious warning, or, as sure as I live, I go out into the open roads and make shorter work of it. I shall, surely as I live!" He then looked round and round the room with a suspicious glare, as if some one was concealed. "How can you want me to tell you of these things? I want no promptings. My heart carries me on only too fast. *You* are forgetting, and will soon have forgotten. I never *can* forget. I saw her last night——" He stopped, looking round wildly.

She was frightened, and soothed him. "Now, Louis," she said, "depend on me. Leave all to me. *Indeed* I have not

forgotten, and never, never shall." Those words of his often repeated themselves; but latterly she had noticed they grew more intense, and lasted longer.

"No," she said, "I must go on. He is right. The guilty still flourish, and shall be overtaken."

But the glowing cheek and rich red lip for which Mrs. Fermor was noted, were paling off into lighter tones. A wrung and wistful look was in her bright eyes. In her little soul, a stiff strong stubborn pride was working. It had worked its way, like a strong current through the earth of an embankment; and the "breach," as it would be called, between her and her "lord," was widening with every fresh day.

She went out a good deal into "society," where, like many wandering married ladies, whose lords do not choose to wander with them, she found plenty of pleasant friends and strangers to chatter with, and even—to use the good-natured word which conveniently cloaks so many derelictions—even to "flirt" with. Had a friendly lady on an ottoman close by introduced that word to her, she would have coloured up, and gathered in the folds of her dress with noisy rustle, and indignantly played the respectable young woman outraged. With *her* it was all homage, and *intellectual* talk with *clever* men—the old moral spring-guns and "gins" of fatal power and mischief. Mrs. Fermor, therefore, was seen at many parties, and the observant remarked that "that Mr. Romaine" was at nearly all the houses where Mrs. Fermor was seen.

There was an intimate air in his manner, the observant observed, which she herself was conscious of, and struggled against. He had the look of coming with her there, and of taking her away, though in effect he did neither. He saw her down to halls, and there imperiously took her cloak from another holding it for her to put on. And though he did not go near her much in rooms, she had a feeling that she was always under his eyes. She began to feel, indeed, that this must not go further, and had determined that, as soon as the holy work in his regard she had put her hand to was satisfactorily accomplished, it *should* cease. Poor quick, vivacious, little soul! impetuous, aggrieved, with a sore heart under her tulle, she was kept up by her pride. That "holy work" she had undertaken was pretty near to being accomplished. It was said that Mrs. Massinger's marriage had made no such brilliant impression as was reckoned on (one of her professional critics said she was "curdy"), and the Town resented it as if it were her

fault. The noble earl who looked to those matters, and "rated" *belles* as seamen are rated, before and after the mast, had smiled contemptuously as he looked down on her through his gold "pinchnose." "Blancmange, my good Fitzroy," he said, shutting up the "pinchnose" with a snap. "Blancmange, and no more. There are people, of course, who *do like* blancmange."

The neophyte was behaving valiantly. It did seem as though he would be firm in his faith. But, alas! already the Fiery Cross of Scandal had been softly passed round by the full fat fingers of dowagers, and the irrevocable "coupling" of her name with that of Mr. Romaine had taken place. Poor foolish, little, innocent, helpless, married woman! The turbaned vultures were already fluttering heavily in the air overhead.

Fermor, the "fallen-short man"—*homme manqué*—was still wrapped in his moodiness as in a cloak. There was bitterness in everything he chewed. Presently, a good-natured elderly man, with grey whiskers and a *square* double eye-glass, came up to him confidentially one evening, and laying the gold glasses on Fermor's shirt, said—"My dear fellow, I know you are a man of sense, and will not take ill what is said by a man old enough to be your father—but—er—I want to speak—about" (cough) "Mrs.—er—Fermor."

Fermor looked at him sharply, and grew hot. "What would you say about Mrs. Fermor?"

"Well," said the other, "it is merely as a friend, you know, and——"

"Oh, of course," said the other, bitterly, "it is always a friend who brings us good news. Well?"

"You see, the world," said the other, stretching out his glass in the direction of the world, but being brought up suddenly by the shortness of the ribbon, "you see, the world, my dear fellow, is censorious, and I *do* think, if you went a *little* more out with Mrs. Fermor, especially to those parties which that half-savage fellow Romaine frequents——"

This came as news indeed for Fermor. "This, then, is the game?" he thought. "I am to be ridiculous through Town; the *mari complaisant*; the easy-tempered jackass. Let her treat me as she pleases at home, but I will not be pointed at."

So to the next party, Captain Fermor announced sullenly that he was going. "With all my heart," said Mrs. Fermor, gaily. "I hope you will go to others too."

Fermor laughed scornfully. "We shall see."

Lady Laura was still fighting the fashionable "good fight." She was labouring on with her old constancy, and seemed to have gained fresh spirit, though not fresh strength. The face was growing yet longer; the worn cheeks yet more worn; but the eye had the old keen wary ken, and swept the line of men with the nicest appreciation, like a general's. Yet there were many things to damp and discourage her.

Though successful with Alicia Mary, whom, with infinite pains and struggling, she had made Mrs. Onslow Piper, still that alliance had brought with it serious charges, and some terrible expenses. Trousseau and breakfast were the least of these; but at the last moment young Piper, with an aggrieved manner, as though he were making this proposal a *test* for whether he had been "taken in" or no, "struck," and bluntly and suspiciously said it was due to his self-respect to "get something;" that his friends said it was "a shame." And though the poor lady-captain did what she could, the odds were too great, and she had to wring out of her own allowance something that would satisfy the greedy youth. There was the London house too, and the London carriage, and London riding horses on job, and the London milliner, Madame Adelaide: but months ago the job-master had talked to Lady Laura in her own hall as if she had been one of his stable-boys; and Madame Adelaide, once sweet and full of lively compliments, was now showing her teeth, and snarling about "her attorney." Yet she fought on, laboured on, for there was hope. Blanche, younger and fresher than Alicia Mary, had somehow been attracting that young Lord Spendlesham, just burst from his guardians, and who, in truth, fancied Blanche. Actually "the thing" was making progress, and Blanche, wearing always a look of devout adoration, and following the noble youth with steady eyes wherever he moved, conveyed the idea of a hopeless idolatry not unpleasing. Lady Laura had friends—good faithful contemporaries—who gave the boy a smile of encouragement, and remarked to him the "fine girl there" who never took her eyes off him.

Young Spendlesham—unconsciously selfish—threw out carelessly many whims and wishes, which were gratified at great cost to the family. He was passionately fond of dancing, and when there was a gap in his programme, outside he would say to Blanche, "Get Lady Lau to give a dance. I dote on dancing." And Lady Lau bowed her head with Spartan courage, and was abroad for one half the day in a cab, and for the other half in her room doing common millinery-work with desperate but

skilful fingers, striving hard to avoid drifting away on the rocks of Madame Adelaide. Whence she wrung out money for these works, and how she faced the rude job-master and the insolent Frenchwoman, and with dignity made them (for the time) ashamed, and how she screwed a little delay out of both job-master and milliner, were things to be admired and compassionated. "If I had only time to breathe," she thought often, "and a little space in front clear! But they come on me all together, and from all sides."

"Ask the Fermors," she said to her daughter. "I hate having aggrieved relations going about."

And this was the party to which Fermor had said so sullenly that he would go.

CHAPTER THE SIXTIETH.

A CLOUD NO BIGGER THAN A HAND.

WHILE Miss Manuel was away, the town had something to talk of. It was soon pretty well known and pretty well talked about, how "that sucking young Spendlesham" was about to make "a greater fool of himself" than ever. His own contemporaries told him, in their friendly way, "not to be an ass," and seriously wondered among themselves what he could see in so plain a virgin, who was almost old enough to be his mother. But among the long tribe of dowagers the attempt was most deeply resented. Had they got her among them in some private place, they would surely have sacrificed her. The fury of this elderly populace knew no bounds, and they almost thirsted for her blood.

It was wonderful indeed. Alicia Mary had been difficult to "placer;" but her incomparable mother had brought her in a winner, as the skilful jockey does the indifferent horse, simply by splendid riding. But what was difficult with Alicia Mary seemed almost impossible with Blanche, who was raw, helpless, and without any fertility of resource. "Splendid riding" was here profitless; but Fortune took pity on this gallant Lady Laura, and, by some combination of accidents, fascinated the young Spendlesham with the charms of Blanche. The "finest woman" he had ever known was a fresh barmaid at a fishing

inn in the country, for whom he had had an agonising attachment. But the barmaid had long since married respectably—i.e. into an opulent butcher interest. The features of Blanche recalled the old romance, and the fresh barmaid seemed to live again in the person of Blanche.

But young Spendlesham was not yet *sui juris*. The law had furnished him with some odious janissaries called guardians, who were wary and watchful. One of these was happily an old admirer of Lady Laura's, Sir John Westende, of Westende House, who, as young Sir John, clapped and applauded when she, as young Lady Laura, was flying round in tulle and flowers on her bare-backed steed. These were the delightful days when we had "figure," and a "neck," and colour, and light in our eyes, and all the ambrosial charms of youth. Sir John, it was thought, was sure to "come forward;" but he was irresolute, and went back again timidly when he had advanced.

The young Sir John of those days had not *then* the Westende property, which came in later. He had a modest but sufficient patrimony, and was deeply in love with Lady Laura. The latter, if ever she liked any man, might be said to have liked Sir John, and told him so. But sentiment, with her, could only be indulged in where it was to be had gratis; any laying out of money on it was out of the question. Young Sir John went away happy, to travel for two months, and when he returned found that a personal friend had been invited to take his place; a personal friend, too, whose prospects were, if anything, only a shade better than his own. The skilful who managed her affairs thought they were bound to give her the benefit of ever so trifling an advantage; and, considering that the Westende property had not then come in, it was only natural that they should act as they did. The balance, which took the shape of sentiment, could not be reduced into moneys numbered; and was, of course, left out of the reckoning. Sir John was put back; the friend, who was shy and retiring, received notice that it was now *his* turn. This caused a breach. Young Sir John, after some excited expostulation, retired to Westende, while Lady Laura married Mr. Fermor.

On this step he was furious, got a severe illness, recovered, and went away to the Continent. By-and-by the aunt died, and the Westende property "came in" unexpectedly. The news gave a dreadful pang to Lady Laura; and later Sir John married handsomely. The lady he married was the well-known Miss Chedder, of the banker's family, with, as some of the elder

ladies put it, "sixty thousand pounds to her back, my dear," but who had also sixty thousand tongues. She was a stalwart lady, and brought with her to the family the whole story of the Fermor affair, which she kept alive and fresh by constant daily allusion, rubbing salt into an old sore. For sixteen years Sir John led a miserable life, with the Lady Laura business daily flourished in his face, hurled at his back as he left the room, tumbled about his ears like broken crockery, dashed on his cheeks like hot scalding tea—until the famous Miss Chedder died, and left him a widower, with two good-looking daughters.

Young Sir John by-and-by thus became a fatherly Sir John, later on a middle-aged Sir John, and was now an elderly Sir John. But he had never forgiven the Fermors. He had grey whiskers and a round clean face, with a light-blue tie and white waistcoat. For him was the handsome carriage with the bays seen waiting at the foot of the steps as the train halted at Westende; and to him porters and station-master at Westende obsequiously touched their caps. Then, as the train passed over the viaduct, its passengers saw the bright carriage and brighter horses below, rolling along the winding road, dipping into the clumps of trees, and reappearing in the sun, making the mile and a half or so of journey which lay between Westende House and the station.

Sir John's sister had married a brother of the late Lord Spendlesham, so that it was quite fitting that he should be appointed one of the guardians. Sir John himself having two good-looking daughters, it was natural that he should begin to associate his ward and his daughters together, in a tranquil and prospective manner. Though he always said that his ward was not worth his salt, and had no wit, and never would have any, and the sooner he made a fool of himself the better.

This at least was his tone until suddenly, one day, a co-guardian came down to the station and took the pleasant road that led to the park, specially to communicate the news that young Spendlesham had announced that he was going to marry on the very day he came of age. Sir John, who was in his garden with his blue tie on and a grey "wide-awake" hat, took this news savagely—his face grew pink with rage and excitement, and he threw down his stick upon the gravel walk. "It shan't be! By —— it shan't be!" he said; "curse their impudence." (Sir John swore on great occasions.) "What do they mean? They have done this on purpose. That woman has laid it all out; I know her."

For an hour he was in a fury, then ordered his carriage, and drove into the country town, six miles off, to see Padgett, the country attorney and coal agent. Having seen Padgett, he posted up to London and saw his ward. He came in on him very hot, and very incoherent. The boy wrapped an imaginary toga about him, and drew himself up to meet the storm. "I don't believe it," said Sir John, injudiciously, "not a word of it. They have been making a fool of you, sir. I wonder you have not more sense. You must be watched like a child in the nursery. Pack up your things, and come down with me to the country. I'll expose these people."

"Never!" said the young lord, still in his toga; "my word is pledged—the word of a peer."

"The word of a noodle," roared Sir John. "Don't spout in that fashion to me! Ah! I am ashamed of you. An old stale bit of crust like that, that has been kicking about the ball-rooms for years."

"It's a shame to speak of a lady in that way," said the youth. "She loves me. I shall be of age in a few months, and can do as I like."

With this tone in the discussion, of course no progress was made. Sir John went away foaming, and determined to expose "those people."

He was at a dinner-party that night, and, after the dinner-party, "went on" moodily to some "rout." There he saw Miss Manuel, who had always a regard for "oldish" men. She was always thus protesting against the cold and pagan system of modern manners, which carries out the aged of the tribe and exposes them, as they get helpless, on mountains, with a pot of rice. She always fought the battle of the old, and said how grateful they were for any consideration, and how anxious to fit themselves to the times that had left them behind, if the world would only let them. This night she was flushed with victory, having just returned from her Welsh expedition.

Sir John told her his troubles, working himself into a perfect heat as he did so. "They are a mere set of adventurers, these Fermors," he said, "that should be exposed. I don't see why I should be keeping them up. They have always treated me scurvily, from the father downwards. I was very near being taken in myself by that scheming woman. She did her best to catch me, but I had wit enough to escape her." (It was so long ago, Sir John might safely give out this new version.) "She was a fine woman then, and I had a raging school-boy's

fancy for her; and, ma'am, behaved nobly—nobly, as it seems to me now—when she found she could not get me, and took up with that stupid blundering Fermor. I could have broken the thing off in ten seconds; but I didn't. I said nothing; no, not a word, and they were married."

Sir John had worked himself into a perfect heat as he thought of his treatment.

Miss Manuel listened eagerly, and then said suddenly, "But I never heard. Do tell me, Sir John."

But Sir John had repented on the spot. It was so long ago, he said; it was a mere story of the day, and he wasn't sure that it *was* a story at all. "Look at their ingratitude," he went on, in a fresh burst; "that poor devil, Pocock, who has helped them through many a business, they will do nothing for him—nothing whatever."

"It is very hard," said Miss Manuel; "you know they are not friends of mine. It is no harm to say that we have cause to regret an acquaintance with *that* family. I am told it is not considered a very serious thing now, and that the young men of the day mean it for mere amusement. But still, I cannot bring myself to know Lady Laura, or to like her."

The allusion to Sir Hopkins made a deep impression on Miss Manuel. She almost despised that restless, plotting spirit, and could scarcely bring herself to think him of sufficient dignity to be the object even of punishment. She had avoided him almost with contempt. Now she sought him. She was struck by the decay and blight that had settled on his face. "You have quite given me up, Sir Hopkins," she said to him. "There was a time when you used to come and see me, and talk about your travels, and the treaties, and wild natives. Come and see me to-morrow."

The old intriguer, whose diplomatic heart was made sick to death by hope deferred, and who had furrows of sickly fretfulness and anxiety marked on his cheeks, was glad to have an opportunity to air his grievances, and came.

His hair was scattered and thin. "It is the way of the world," he said, nervously (he was only now finding out *that* way of the world)—"always the way they use you when they don't want you." (But had it not been Sir Hopkins's own way to the world?) "I am sure a man who had composed those Waipiti troubles would have a claim. Why, old Lord Boldero said to me, only this day, 'No fellow like you, Pocock, for handling the natives!' His very words, Miss Manuel! And

that young conceited Harding Hanaper, who can sit in an office easily enough, and give pert answers easily enough too, he tells me that he is afraid nothing can be done for me."

"But," said Miss Manuel, "you should get your friends to work for you—the Fermors, for instance."

"The Fermors!" said Sir Hopkins; "I would not ask them for anything. You don't know all I have done for those people—the sacrifices, the trouble. They can work the Buryshaft influence well, but they refused. You don't know what obligations they are under to me."

"It is very hard," said Miss Manuel.

"Hard! it is monstrous!" he said, piteously. "They talk of getting old! Look at Boldero, he is ten years older than I am, and they sent *him* out. Of course they did. He has married into the office, and they will do any job for him. But it is always the way—and the way of the world."

It was pitiable to hear this worldling so severe on the world he had loved and served. As Miss Manuel looked at him, she wondered at the change that had come on him. He seemed to have grown old and almost drivelling. A year or two of chafing and importunity and anxiety had brought this all about. He was no longer the pleasant Sir Hopkins, who gave dinners and who ate them, and who went along the highways of life in listen shoes. No wonder the young flippant children of the F. O. said he had quite "broken up." "I don't speak to the Fermors now," he went on. "All I asked her was to go to the old duke, who used to admire her so long ago. He couldn't refuse. I *know* he couldn't. There is a history about that. Then I said, a letter, a few lines. She wants to nurse her interest for her family. Carter, too, who did dirty work enough for the family—they have treated him just the same."

Miss Manuel's eyes flashed. "Dirty work, indeed," she said; "but he will find his account. And they will all find their account!"

Sir Hopkins looked a little confused. "I meant," he said, "that old business, long ago. As for Eastport, I give you my word of honour, Miss Manuel——"

Said Miss Manuel, suddenly: "I have some little influence in the direction you speak of. An official friend told me lately that he could help a friend of mine, in a small way; that is, I could speak to him, you know."

"*Could* you! oh, *could* you!" said Sir Hopkins, in the fervour of senile gratitude. "How kind, how good, how generous!"

Oh, Miss Manuel, I shall never forget it ; never, never ! Anything, you know, will do."

"It is difficult," she said ; "but I can promise it to you. There was an island 'going'—Prince Somebody's, I think."

"Yes, yes. Lee Boo's. How did you know?" he said, in astonishment.

"I know many things," said Pauline ; "more than ever a diplomatist would suppose ; and I am curious to know more. I have a woman's taste for gossip, Sir Hopkins. Sit down there, and tell me your little bit of ugly family business—to amuse me."

Instantly he became the old sly-looking Sir Hopkins, and glanced at her sideways, as he would have done long ago at a Waipiti trying to take him in. "I am not to be entrapped or seduced," he seemed to say. What he did say was, "Oh, it is a stupid old story, Miss Manuel ; would not interest you in the least. But," he added, nervously, "about Harding Hanaper. He has influence *there*, which he ought not to have, and a word from him——"

"And a word from me to him?" said Pauline. "No, I am afraid. You see, I must keep any little trifling influence I have for my own family, like Lady Laura, and for my slaves, who work for me and gratify my whims."

Sir Hopkins looked at her piteously. He understood perfectly. "I shouldn't have alluded to it ; I was irritated ; you *know*," he said, almost imploringly. "Family honour and chivalry. No, it would not be right, indeed."

Miss Manuel burst into a fit of laughter. "What heroics!" she said. "Who dreams of touching the family honour? Not I, indeed, I assure you. But I was only joking, Sir Hopkins. Poor me to have influence with Harding Hanaper, or with any one! They only laugh at us weak women." And she stood up. "I have heaps of letters to write. By the way, I have just written to Harding Hanaper." And she pointed to a note in the distance.

Miserable irresolution was in Sir Hopkins's anxious face. But he could not resist going out with pride and dignity, and doing a bit of the old Waipiti intrigue. "You are very cruel to me, Miss Manuel," he said. "You bear malice, I see. Good-bye."

Miss Manuel stood in the same attitude for many moments, watching the door by which he had passed. "I hold him," she said triumphantly, "in the hollow of my hand. The wretched creature would sell his soul for office." She was turning to go

to her desk, when the door was opened softly, the worn face was put in again, and Sir Hopkins said—

"If you are not busy now, Miss Manuel——"

"Busy!" said she, "not at all! We can have an hour's comfortable chat, and tea—I know you like your afternoon cup of tea—and, shall I tell them to let in no one?"

Sir Hopkins looked over irresolutely in the direction of Mr. Harding Hanaper's note. It was not gone. He drew in his chair, laid his hat on the ground beside him, as he always did, and said, "Shall I tell you a story——?"

"I see I shall have to re-write my letter," said Miss Manuel, tearing up Mr. Hanaper's letter.

"So you see," said Sir Hopkins, with his old Waipiti smile, as he rose to go away, having quite talked himself into a fluent diplomatic vein, "so you see it is nothing but a bit of old family scandal. Such things gather at the skirts of every respectable house in the country. Where there are young men, there will always be a little folly of this kind. Miss Manuel, I believe Mr. Harding Hanaper is still in town, and——"

"And this is all?" said Miss Manuel, with her eye fixed coldly on him; "this is all?"

"This is all," Sir Hopkins said, going away

When he had gone, Miss Manuel said to herself, "He has not told a quarter of the truth! He thinks he can keep his wretched old hand in practice on *me*! If he chooses to play these tricks, he must pay the penalty. I gave him one chance, and he has thrown it away." She then sat down to her letters. She did not write to Harding Hanaper, but to her fresh elderly friend, Sir John, who admired her as "a fine woman."

"DEAR SIR JOHN,—As you mentioned that you were anxious about that foolish ward of yours, who is so determined to become a husband, I am Samaritan enough to let you know that I am likely enough to know something that may be useful. You seemed annoyed about the business, and I could not help taking this trouble to assist you. In the mean time, I would advise your not going to Lady Laura Fermor, as you seemed to think of doing, until we hear something more.

— "PAULINE MANUEL."

Sir Hopkins, passing again, saw the messenger go with the notes in his hand. He chuckled and became two years younger on the spot. "I can manage the Waipiti yet, though they talk

of superannuating me. Old Laura will do something for me with Buryshaft, when I tell her this. You did not get much out of me, Miss Manuel, and I shall be 'His Excellency' very soon!"

CHAPTER THE SIXTY-FIRST.

THE CLOVEN FOOT.

AT Lady Laura's entertainment was seen Mr. Romaine and the "blancmange-faced" new Mrs. Massinger. There were others, too, of good quality; for young Spendlesham had said that he did not like being "put down" with all sorts of low people. He had his dance, and his many dances, with other young ladies besides Blanche; but he used to come up with his handkerchief to his face, saying, "Well, this is wonderful fun!" Before the night was over he was beside "Lady Lau," pouring into her ear details of a new scheme.

"I say, we must indeed. These things are so easy to get up, and you can hire dresses and properties." The youth was alluding to the entertainment known as *Tableaux Vivans*. "How we used to get them up at Spendlands! I was Cardinal Wolsey. I could get the dress again, I know."

The veteran's heart sank within her at the costly nature of this species of show, and some faint protest escaped her, something about the "smallness of their house." The youth, sensitive and selfish, laughed this off pleasantly. "Small! Not a bit of it," he said; "we shall squeeze them all in. It will be splendid. Leave it to me." Lady Laura, who felt that this, indeed, if laid on, would be the last straw upon the sadly worn and strained camel's back, in these desperate straits thought of a dismal ruse. She was looking round mysteriously, and putting her face close to young Spendlesham's with marvellous significance. "It would be charming," she said; "such a treat for the girls! But you know old Lady Bowler—next door, you understand—she would let loose her whole conventicle on the poor children, and then, you know, she is dreadful, my dear Lord, you don't know how she embitters our life."

This social exhumation of Lady Bowler had its effect, and silenced the youth. But he was sullen and aggrieved. "Very

well," he said; "just as you like. It makes no matter, none in the world. The Chillingworths said something to me about it yesterday, and they have *such* a 'jolly room.'"

Lady Laura had still her smile "on;" but it was a sickly smile. At this moment came up Blanche, with an officer in custody. The bright young creature, full of natural warmth and animation, was eager for news.

"You have settled it all," she said, enlarging the officer, "I see you have. 'Isn't it delightful, mamma? Lord Spendlesham says I am to be Pomona, and be all over gold apples.'"

The youth's hands found their way gloomily to the depths of his pockets. "O no! no, no!" he said, "it's all given up; that is, at your house; and there's some Methodist that won't have it. But it makes no matter. I shall get it up at the Chillingworths'."

The look of reproach and silent agony that the dutiful child flung at her mother, would be hard to describe. "It is all a mistake," she said. "Nonsense. Mamma doesn't mean it." Lady Laura saw by this time that delay would be fatal, so she bent down her poor overloaded worn bleeding camel's hump, and took up this last burden with assumed cheerfulness. The whole was settled that night. Young Spendlesham laid out reckless schemes of expense. He enlisted arbitrarily a whole corps before the night was over. "I tell you who I have made up my mind to have; that little Mrs. Fermor."

"Charles's wife?" cried Blanche, faintly.

"Do you know, I like Charles's wife," said the young lord, pleasantly. "There is something so smart and quick about her. I am sure she is good fun. Yes, we shall have Charles's wife, but not Charles himself. There's Romaine. I must speak to him."

Fermor—the poor pariah of the party, the interdicted from the fire and water of conversation—kept at the door. He had now grown sensitive, scorning to intrude himself or his gifts upon mammas with absently-roving eyes and business-like daughters. Standing in this mood, he saw Hanbury come up the stairs—the new and changed Hanbury, with his curious mournful manner. He seemed to bring with him all the old Eastport associations, and Fermor walked hastily away. "He will be coming to me," he thought, "and playing off his new aggrieved character. He means all the women to be pointing to him, and wanting to know the story of his blighted heart. I wish to Heaven I was out of this place, and out of the whole

concern!" But in a few minutes Hanbury was beside him. "I am so glad, Fermor," he said. "It is so long since I have seen you."

"You do come out to parties, it seems?" said Fermor, with a half sneer.

"Not often," said Hanbury, sadly. "I never cared for such things, as I dare say you recollect. What brought me here to-night was the hope of meeting you. I had something to tell you. Just come out here on the stairs."

"Why not here?" said Fermor, more and more resenting the "Werner manner."

"I know," said John Hanbury, interpreting all this, and coming back the little way he had gone, "that I never succeeded in making myself a friend of yours, and that by some unfortunate mistake we never were as well known to each other as we might have been. Something came in the way. I did not understand you; very likely you did not understand me. I know I am rough, and have my faults. Perhaps, if we had both tried sincerely to be more at one, a hundred things might not have happened. But that is all past."

Again this tone grated on Fermor. Had Hanbury said merely that *he* could not understand Fermor, and that if *he* had tried to do so, he could not, it would have been more deferential.

"I never try to understand any man," said Fermor, coldly. "It is too much trouble. I take what is on the surface. But this business, as you say—what do you wish me to do for you?"

John Hanbury shook his head, as though he said, "You *will* not understand me." "Very well," he said; "it is about yourself, Fermor. You know there are not many things in life that I have much interest in now. The Manuels and their happiness is all I think of. What they love and have loved, I care for. There was one, Fermor, whom we knew, and whose dear memory we cling to, and it is for her sake, and for the sake of what I know were her last wishes, that I now——"

"I don't know what object you have," said Fermor, colouring, "in making these allusions, or in bringing up this subject; but I must tell you plainly I do not like to discuss it."

"This is the way," said John Hanbury, hopelessly. "I always say more than I mean, and I know I am blunt and rough in approaching subjects. But, Fermor, listen to me. I say I would do anything for them. And you, Fermor, do not see the world so much now—at least, have not the opportunity of hearing what I can hear. Do forgive me if I speak too plainly; but

it is indeed for your interest. I don't know how to approach it, and I am sure you will not like it, but I must speak. I know it would be her wish. Mrs. Fermor is so gentle, so trustful, so——"

"Now, Mr. Hanbury," said Fermor, his voice trembling, "I must request that this subject will not be pursued. You are, as you say, well meaning, though unfortunate in your manner. I don't want to hear about it. I don't want advice from *any* man. I can manage my own house. Everybody seems to think they can lecture me about my own concerns; and I tell you again, I don't require it, and *won't have it.*"

"But you don't know the danger," said Hanbury, desperately. "You don't see what is coming. I know more than you think. It is my duty to warn you, no matter how you may take it. That Romaine, I tell you, is not the man to be so intimate at your house, and you should look after it. Forgive me, but every one is talking of it."

"Once more," said Fermor, excitedly, "I tell you to stop this, Mr. Hanbury. I will *not* take it. So *you* wish to be an adviser? You must excuse me for saying that I shall not come to you for assistance. Your counsels, as regards your own interest, have not been *so very successful.*"

"No, indeed," said he, sadly; "you are right. But I must tell you this, at all risks. I know your affairs. There is that Sir John Westende: he is a dangerous man. You should go to him, and conciliate him. Ask Lady Laura, and she will tell you the same."

This was past endurance.

"You won't take a hint, Mr. Hanbury?" said he, struggling to be calm. "Let me ask you, do you wish to quarrel, or to hear something from me that I should be sorry to have said?"

"Oh, you shall not quarrel with me," said Hanbury, calmly, and turning away. "Nothing that you could say," he added, solemnly, "shall ever offend me. There are reasons why you should be privileged. You seem blinded, Fermor: you will not be guided; but I shall not desist. I shall help you in spite of yourself."

The state he left Fermor in may be conceived. He always felt agony under the sense of this air of what he took for superior patronage.

He then saw Romaine come over to Mrs. Fermor, and pitch his chair close to hers, as it might be a tent. She was in a corner, and Mr. Romaine's tent quite cut her off from the com-

pany. He then began to talk with great earnestness. Fermor's falling on this new situation, and Fermor's memory suggesting to him the stories the good-natured friend had told him, the effect was as of scarlet cloth tossed and shaken before him.

"Look at Orson," said Mr. Romainé, moodily, "how he is glaring at us?"

Mrs. Fermor looked up innocently, but did not see which face he meant.

"Orson?" she said; "whom do you call by that ugly name?"

"Don't you see," he said, "*your* conjugal Orson? You know what I mean."

Mrs. Fermor, colouring as she always did, moved back her chair a little, and half rose.

"You can't mean *that*," she said; "I am sure not. At least, if you do, I must go to the person you mention so disrespectfully."

"Exactly," he said, without moving. "Always the way—every little idle word caught up and registered. Why, I call every husband Orson. What are they all but Orsons—brutes—irreclaimable savages? What am I myself? And what do *you* think me in your heart of hearts, but a wild, untamed Orson, fresh from the woods?"

Mrs. Fermor felt a twinge. She felt for this poor rude man, who had no friends; no kith nor kin, and who was grateful for a little sympathy, and over whom *she held such a secret power*. So she said, quickly, "No, no, I don't agree to that. You are not quite so bad."

"How good *you* are!" he said, with grateful eyes. "I am but an acquaintance, but those who know you better, how *they* must appreciate; for instance, your husband, whom I so thoughtlessly and irreverently called 'Orson.' How he must prize and cherish, how 'uxorious'—is not that the word?—he must be, even to fatigue; he must play the doting husband to perfection! Eh?"

Again the old doubting look came on Mrs. Fermor's face. She did not answer. A pink, handsome, and rather foolish face then came to Mr. Romainé, and said—

"I say, Romainé, why don't you come? My wife has sent me for you. She has all sorts of secrets, and has been signalling this half-hour."

Romainé threw Mrs. Fermor a look of significance, as who should say, "You see." He stooped over and said, in a low

voice, "Do you know what is behind all this? Riding to-morrow in the Park—a pic-nic the day after—then a three weeks' visit down at Massinger. They are filling their house, and *she* says they can't get on without me. These are the little secrets. Give a poor outcast your advice—come."

Mrs. Fermor, with glowing cheeks, could not restrain her little smile of pride. She had the bold dangerous man completely in her power, to mould him for his own good. "You will not go," she said. "You must not go; at least, I have no influence, I know, but——"

"No influence!" he said, and paused. "Well, I say nothing of that. They will have their plays—'amateur theatricals' as they call them. They will make me the 'premier amoureux.' Why, even that donkey Spendlesham is getting them up. Tableaux, he calls them. They are to have you. He has just asked me. Ah! you could act! What parts shall we choose—Alexander and the two Queens, or Petrarch and his Laura?"

A little bewildered at this rambling speech, Mrs. Fermor could only say, "Oh no, indeed I could not."

"You no influence?" he went on. "Yes, you have. I confess it. I have felt it for weeks back growing steadily every day. I cannot trust myself, but I can trust you. Don't think that your life is not known to me, and that I do not feel for you. I know what goes on in your house. I know—and forgive me for saying so—that there has been one more fatal mistake added to the tremendous list of mistakes, now nearly full——"

"Mr. Romaine," she began, much frightened.

"Stay. I confess," he went on, "at first I met you with that indifference which I feel for every woman. But this has been wearing away. It is altogether worn away *now*. Oh, you might do much with me—much more than you have done. But things cannot go on always as they go on now. My heart burns to see one that I call Orson so cold and neglectful, when there is one as you know and understand——"

"I *do* understand," said she, in a perfect tumult of terror and surprise, and trembling with agitation. "At last—Oh, let me out—let me go! You should not have done this, Mr. Romaine—for shame, for shame! Oh, let me out quick—let me pass!"

He never moved. "That is well done," he said calmly. "Now I go on. 'O lovely Laura! what rage in those flashing eyes! You cannot conceal the flutterings of your heart,' and so

on—— We shall do it very well together on Spendlesham's boards."

For a moment she was astounded at this readiness and coolness; but in another moment the earnestness of his first speech came back upon her, and she said again, "Oh, for shame, for shame! It was very cruel of you! Oh, what do you mean? Now let me go; and you must never, never speak to me again."

At this moment Fermor came striding up. He had been looking on. He pushed past Romaine rather rudely, put out his arm for his wife, and said, in a fierce whisper, "Come away at once. You are making me the talk of the room. Come at once. Come home. You shall answer to me for this!"

The little woman, so warm and impetuous, had behaved nobly and chivalrously, as she fancied. She was firmly determined never to open her lips to Romaine again; and yet *this* was her reward!

Fermor saw the resentment in her face. "I suppose you mean to brave me here, before all these people?" He was beside himself with rage. "Come away, I say—have at least some semblance of respect and decency."

"Respect and decency!" said Romaine, laughing. "What odd words you use, Fermor!"

"Would you allow us to go by?" said Fermor, with forced politeness.

"With all my heart," said the other. "But you gave us such a start. We were talking of such interesting things. But all secrets, remember, Mrs. Fermor, or your husband will have me out the first thing in the morning."

This, though spoken gaily, contained a hint for Mrs. Fermor, which she could not but take.

Fermor made no reply, but hurried her down-stairs. "We must see about this," he said, under his breath, "and settle the thing one way or the other. You are at perfect liberty to consult your own reputation as you please, but I am determined I shall *not* be made the laughing-stock of the town. I am not, to be compromised."

He felt her arm trembling on his, but she said nothing. Here was injustice—monstrous, killing injustice. Something like the shade of a blight flashed across her.

As they went home in the little dark brougham, there was one of the old stormy miserable scenes. "You can have no respect for me, and none for yourself," said the little woman,

trembling, "to say such things publicly." She was about to add, "If you only knew;" but she was checked, for she felt that she dare not even hint at Romaine's behaviour. "You never speak to me kindly; you never take me anywhere; you never encourage, never protect me, as I see other husbands treat their wives. No, but you are too cold, and care for nothing in the wide world but for yourself. As, indeed, Mr. Romaine says"—and she was about to quote that speech of his about "fatal mistakes," but she stopped in alarm.

"Go on," said he, with forced calmness; "pray tell us what Mr. Romaine says. So it is come to this," he said, with a new burst. "But it serves me right. They warned me in time, but I, foolishly, would not listen."

With quivering lip Mrs. Fermor retorted—she was very quick of temper, it must be repeated—"And I was warned too. But I should like to know who has gained most by the affair. I tell you, you will not dispose of me as you did of others. *My heart shall not be broken, nor shall I wear myself into the grave to suit your plans.*"

"No fear, indeed," said he, with a trembling voice. "She was an angel, a gentle, quiet, sweet angel. God forgive me for that crime, it was the great mistake of my life. I did not know what I was doing. I must have been mad."

"And you speak of it in this way to me," said Mrs. Fermor, beside her little wits, from grief, and wounded vanity, and rage. "Ah! you will tell me, next, that you married me for papa's money. Go on and finish; we may as well hear it all out now!"

"Suppose I say I did," replied he, unable to resist the taunt; it was now a battle à outrance. "Suppose I say that I did. It was what they called a good match. It is not the first thing of the kind that has been done! It was an unfortunate day for me, God knows! I might have been happy and peaceful now—in my proper station in society which I have lost, instead of being—Confusion!" he added, in a fresh burst, as he thought of all his wrongs and insults. "I have been a fool and a madman! But I tell you I shall see to all this, and it *shall* be changed. They shan't point to me as a cipher, nor shall any of the rude low admirers you choose to encourage make me their butt. Never!" he added, vehemently. "So take care—I insist and require and command that you never exchange a word in future with that man Romaine."

"How dare you speak in this way to me?" said she, hysterically.

"Mind what I have told you; and I shall see that you do what you are told. I want no argument."

"Ah! then, we *shall* see," said Mrs. Fermor, with defiance.

Not a word more was spoken on that dismal passage home. When they entered, she flew upstairs, and rushed into her father's room.

CHAPTER THE SIXTY-SECOND.

A DISCOVERY.

GRIM Mr. Carlay was reading when his daughter entered, and flung herself down at his knees, sobbing and crying hysterically. Her rich long hair had broken from all fastening, and came tumbling about her in a shower.

"My heart is breaking," she said; "help me, papa. He is killing me!"

A spasm of pain passed over his face for a moment, and he drew a deep sigh.

"My poor child," he said, with wonderful affection for so grim a being. "The old story; I knew it was hurrying on to this. We try every one else, and, after all, we come back to the old father or mother."

"But oh!" continued she, "he has dared to slander me; to insult me publicly. He is killing me. This very night——"

"I understand," said he. "I know it all. I have at last come to know him thoroughly. He is a wretch without a heart; faithless and unworthy of you and your affection."

"He has insulted me!" she said, starting up. "I shall never forget it. I shall never forgive it. If he only knew that at the very instant he was accusing me—at that moment I was behaving in a way that he should have been proud of! But let he himself take care. He talks about being sensitive of his own reputation, and about being pointed at. I say, papa, let *him* take care!"

● "These are no discoveries to me," said her father, sadly.

"Ah! then why," said she, "why did you let me be sacrificed? He tells me now, openly, that it was your money he wanted, and that he sold himself. Ah! why did you allow this sale, if you knew so much, papa?"

"My darling," said he, "I thought your heart was set upon it, and I wished to gratify you in every way. I was foolish—stupid; but," said he, rising and stalking to the door, "it is not too late yet. I have worse to tell you, darling; things which it is right that you should know—things that I have discovered. For I have not been shut up all day and night among musty books. I have been searching, watching—spying, some would say—but all for you."

"Yes," said she, eagerly; "tell me all, papa!"

He went on hurriedly—

"I suspected *him* from the beginning. Men do not forsake their homes, and always be found abroad, or be harsh to their wives, without some outside reason. I know the world pretty well. These things repeat each other every day and every hour. What would you say if that friend of your heart—that bright, noble Miss Manuel—the heroine—whom you watched in sickness, and have almost worshipped, who has kissed you, as you told me, over and over again——"

Mrs. Fermor started back. "Impossible!" she said. "You don't know her, father. What has she done, then?"

"*She is your enemy.* I know it. I swear it. She it is who has drawn away your husband from you. This is the secret of his absences. She has been trading on the old miserable vanity with which he is stuffed. He has been there day after day. On nights, when he was away till three and four, he was at her suppers. He was watching for her in the Parks, hanging about her street, about her carriage. And all because she made some speech that has set his pride rampant. And she your friend, whom you almost saved from death. In this way she repays you!"

Mrs. Fermor was looking at him quite scared. "Impossible! Oh no, no," she said, in a low voice, and drawing back; "you don't know her."

"Ah, see, my darling!" he said, catching her by the hand. "How *could* she like *you*? You are in her sister's place. It is not in human nature. Better to know the worst. Look here!" and he opened his desk, and took out some half a dozen letters, which he opened slowly, one after the other. "Is this her writing? Look," and he showed her first that old letter of Miss Manuel's, in which she had invited Fermor to her supper, and then others in the same strain; notes, notelets, long, short; on large paper, on small paper, and on tiny scraps, signed only with initials; all the tokens, in short, of an intimate relation. "Here

are answers," he went on, "and you will know *this* hand." And he spread out Fermor's notes in the same way. Mrs. Fermor looked from one to the other of them, and back again, very wildly and distractedly. "This is," he said, "what the world would call shabby and dishonourable. But I love my child and her happiness, and scruple at nothing to effect that."

"My happiness!" she said, sadly.

"Yes, your happiness," he answered, quickly; "it will all lead to that. The first step is knowing the worst. The next is, to look out for a remedy: and we must have done with this man—done with him for ever."

"Done with him for ever?" she repeated, mechanically.

"Yes," he said; "he is unworthy of you. We shall leave this miserable country, and leave him. It was a wretched mistake from the very beginning. Once freed from him, we shall begin to be happy together again. You will get ill, my child; already I find your cheeks pale and worn. Abroad, there is joy and happiness and comfort in store for us yet. If you remain, you die."

"Leave *him*—and here with her? Never, papa, never, while I live!"

"He is not worth a thought," said he, hastily. "We *must* go. It is the only course."

"And leave him behind free from me, whom he hates, to enjoy himself, and leave *her* no punishment? Never, papa. Ah! let me stay and die."

"Who knows?" said her father, gloomily; "we may punish him before we leave. But all in good time; depend on it, the guilty shall not escape."

"And oh!" burst out Mrs. Fermor, giving way suddenly to a paroxysm of tears, "she, that woman whom I tried to make my friend; whom I loved!"

CHAPTER THE SIXTY-THIRD.

"OLD FOLEY."

SIR JOHN WESTENDE, though a squire, was crafty enough in his generation. He thought Miss Manuel's counsel good as to the secrecy, and did not show his hand too soon. He was

even friendly with his nephew, and said to him in his rough way, "Well, if you will make a born ass of yourself, you must." But at home he indemnified himself by swearing and railing at his daughters, telling them they were "a hopeless, helpless pack," and that he was "sick of the whole lot;" ending generally with a violent question as to "what were they staring at him in that way for?" and finally bidding them "get out of his sight, for he couldn't stand them!" And the poor frightened motherless girls, who had this paternal food served to them every day, with the regularity of meals, fled away from his presence like a flock of sheep from the shepherd's dog.

Lady Laura, too, had a consciousness of a danger. For the first time in her life, she began to give way to a sense of hopelessness, and to give entrance to the grim and gloomy visitors called forebodings. As she turned round to north, south, east, and west successively, and saw the passage growing blocked in each direction, she began to feel sudden sinkings of the heart, for the first time during her fifty or sixty years' struggle. These, however, might have been the natural weakness of coming age. She had fought, suffered, and received such cruel scars, that it was no wonder she should feel pains.

From the first she had divined the opposition from Sir John Westende, and had tried to bring him over. But she well knew he had never forgiven her—not so much for the mortification as for the years of tyranny which she had indirectly brought on him. For he was one of those ferocious wild animals who roar, and tear, and even devour the spectators, but who are surprisingly tame and docile under the eye of the keeper. She even tried to stir the cold ashes of the old romance with her fan, and let a few of the white particles float in the air, but this she saw was only a further stimulant. She then wisely gave up all attempts at conciliation, and determined for fighting in the open field.

He went to consult Miss Manuel again. He burst into his old complaints. "Is it not shameful?" he said. "There should be an Act of Parliament to protect boys against these women. I'll show the whole system up, if I die for it. On my soul, I believe she will put him in a coach some night, and marry him before the child knows what he is doing. The worst is, I don't see my way. Can you think of something?"

Miss Manuel thought a moment. "You know Sir Hopkins Pocock?" she said. "Very well. A wretched, restless, agitating creature, who would sell his soul for place. Go to him, and talk of your influence. That private family skeleton we spoke of

the other day," she said, smiling, "is in some museum, in the country somewhere. It has been smuggled away, but can be recovered."

Sir John, a country gentleman, did not quite follow. "What d'ye mean about the skeletons?" he said.

"I mean," said Miss Manuel, "the little secret story you hinted at the other day. It may be worth nothing; but still, where the interest of a child, your ward, is concerned, everything is fair. You might use this as a lever."

"A lever! yes," said Sir John, still doubtful; "but where did you get about the skeleton?"

"A mere figure of speech," said she; "a way people have of talking. Or stay," she said; "there is Major Carter, who knows all the world, and is flattered by attention. Ask him to dine, and he may help you."

Sir John Westende took both courses. From Sir Hopkins, who cringed to him with senile homage, he heard of an old Peninsular colonel whom he himself had known, and Major Carter, who knew all the world, was likely enough to have fallen in with him.

"If I could only light on that old Foley now," he thought. "He knows and knew everything, and every story. But he is dead long ago; had to live at some of those wretched half-pay French foreignering places." (Sir John took the true squire's view of Boulogne and other foreign ports, as being solely created for English gentlemen of limited means.) He asked Major Carter about it.

"The old colonel dead?" said the major. "Not he! Lives at Dunkirk, of all places in the world! But he says he gets his rubber there. He was here last week, but has gone back, I am afraid. The colonel's purse is not very deep—unless, indeed, he has made something out of his whist here. Shall we go and see him, Sir John? By the way, I forget. Did you know him?"

"Not met him for years," said Sir John. "But I have a particular reason for wishing to meet him now." Then he told Major Carter (whom he said he saw was "a man of the world") what this reason was.

"Just the man!" cried the major. "You have a surprising instinct, Sir John! Why, he could write a book, the most delightful work of our times, all the scandal, all the divorces, all the esclandres—the *true* history, you understand, Sir John! He has them all at his fingers' ends. It would be the most fascinating book."

The old Peninsular colonel must have made profit out of his whist; for he was still in Town, in the bay-window of his club, with his newspaper attached to a stick, which he handled as if he were a pointsman signalling a train. He had a very large hat on. The blood in his face was so marbled and extravasated that it seemed as if made out of good Bologna sausage; while his stock was so stiff and straight that it seemed as if he were always looking out of an iron chimney-pot after having newly swept a gigantic chimney. He was glad to see Carter, and was glad to see Carter's friend, for he had just done with his pointsman's flag, and was thinking of sherry. "Have something?" he said. "No?" And having "had something" himself, the marbled Bologna sausage surface seemed to become illuminated from within, and glowed.

The major very soon led them across France into the Peninsula, and took them back some thirty or forty years, and called up Lord Wellington, and Pack, and Beresford, and that "chicken-hearted" scoundrel, Joseph. "Why, dammy!" roared the colonel, the Bologna sausage distending alarmingly, "we had a little drummer that would have stood up to him, and made him run."

"You had queer days in Madrid that time, colonel," said the major.

"Ay, ay," said the Peninsular colonel, "both then and later. I was there in 'twenty-five, too, and met some of the old set. What times we had, sir! Dammy, sir, there are no *men* on earth now. No men, sir, with real heads and stomachs. They don't know how to drink! It ain't life now; at least, it ain't life as it used to be"—then added the colonel, as a dropping shot after a volley—"dammy!"

"The colonel," said Major Carter to Sir John, with great approbation, "knows, and has seen a great deal. It is really instructive to hear him."

"Bless you!" said Colonel Foley (using the benediction precisely in the same meaning as he did his favourite malediction)—"Bless you! I could tell you stories by the yard! Ay, sir! and stories that would take your wind away, sir; and, sir, about some of the—ve-ry—first—families in the country," added he, stooping forward, and speaking slow; "the very first. Ay, sir, and some of your fine high women," he continued, glowing at the recollection of some neglect, "who now give themselves airs; I could have them at my knees, crying, 'For God's sake, don't expose us! Dammy, colonel, don't!'"

"Did you ever," said Sir John, a little impatient at the colonel's reminiscences, "fall in with a person called Fermor?"

"Fermor? Fermor?" said the colonel, searching his memory. "Ah, to be sure! I suppose I didn't know Lady Laura—a fine spanking creature she was! I could tell you some of her games. By the Lord, sir, the night of the fresco business down at the what-d'ye-call-'em villa on the Thames, and we had the walks lit up, excepting the arbour, which was forgotten, dammy, sir, if I didn't——"

Major Carter here nervously interposed, "Our friend, Sir John, is connected, I believe——"

"No, no," said Sir John, hotly. "I have nothing to say to *them*. And I don't care what is said of them. There was a story, Colonel Foley, some thirty years ago; as a club man you knew it—we all knew it; I should know it myself, but somehow my memory does not help me now. I want to find that story. You remember a scampish fellow they had among them, Fermor's brother, that went to the dogs?"

"Ah! you're right, you're right," said Colonel Foley, with great enjoyment. "Ah, Jack Fermor, I knew him, sir! I once lent him ten pounds, and dammy, sir, if I wasn't the only man he ever paid——"

"But what was the business?" asked Sir John, impatiently; "it was cushioned in some wonderful way."

"Bless your soul," said the colonel, with the same absence of spiritual meaning, "that was *her*, all *her*! She managed the whole of it. She had the spirit of ten men. Did you ever know that she went over herself, and settled it all?"

"Ah!" said Sir John, with great interest, "that was the way it never got out."

"Exactly, sir. It was the middle of winter, too, with ice, sir, as thick as that book, sir," pointing to a London Directory. "And up-on, my soul, sir, she was expecting to be confined of her first child. That I know. And I call that a fine plucky, spanking thing of her. As for the quiet sneak Fermor she married, he wasn't fit to sweep that crossing, sir."

"He was a poor creature," said Sir John, cordially.

"She settled the whole business, sir. Saw the consuls, ministers, every man Jack of them, talked to them, bought them—seventeen and sixpence went a long way then in those foreigneering courts—and brought off her man! What was better, sir, not a soul could make out what it was all about."

"Precisely," said Sir John. "I never could get at it."

"That was *her*, you see," said the colonel. "If I didn't admire her for it! I was one of the few that knew about the business, and, dammy, if she didn't bring the round—round and round again, sir. Now, is she going on still?"

"What did I tell you, Sir John?" said Major Carter, in delight. "Is not the colonel pleasant? We ought to get him to come and fix a day before he goes back to Dunkirk."

"Ah, yes," said Sir John, eagerly, "the very thing. You must dine with me, colonel; a little snug private dinner—only ourselves."

"Dammy," said the colonel, "how gluey I feel! They swindle us at this place with their infernal bottles—they don't half fill 'em. Here, waiter, soda. They keep the worst lot of servants in the kingdom. Well, where was I? I could talk this way until midnight. Here, you! bring that after me to the smoking-room. You don't mind coming there, eh?"

Sir John was a man of business, and had his time pretty well filled up. "I tell you what, colonel," he said, looking at his watch, "dine with me to-day—you and Carter here—at my club. A snug little thing. Only ourselves."

"I will, upon my soul," said the colonel, eagerly, and almost ferociously. "That will be more like it. Good Lord!" he said, by no means conscious of any devotional appeal, "what things I could tell you, if I only could collect my wits. Talk of old What's-his-name's Recollections, which I'm told they're all reading now! Why, dammy, I could beat him against a wall, story for story." "Why, they're nothing but slops, mere slops, sir."

CHAPTER THE SIXTY-FOURTH.

COLONEL FOLEY'S REMINISCENCES.

THAT evening, at Sir John's club—the Country Gentleman's—which, the colonel said, he was glad to see had none of their "eternally lost" gewgaw "sugar-stick" stuck over it inside and out—none of your "sickening theatrical scene-shifting places—all windows," where you caught your death of cold, but a snug, old-fashioned place, where all the high-priced

papers were taken in, and where brass buttons and yellow trousers were familiar to the eye: at this club, then, in a private room, the three gentlemen had a pleasant little dinner.

"This is something like," said the colonel. "I call this a place for a gentleman! Dammy, I don't want to be stuck up in a plate-glass case, like a dried fish in a museum, so that the people in the streets may stare up at you. I don't call *that* sort of thing a club. And the stuff they give you! You might as well put a file down my throat as the liquor we had to-day." Which community in the participation of the brandy was a pardonable delusion on the colonel's part.

He was very amusing, this old colonel. But some of his stories were frightful. *He* did not deal in what he called "slops." Men and women—widows, virgins, and wives—he slaughtered wholesale—like the great Human Sacrifices at Dahome. Later he came back to the subject of the morning.

"I never saw such a wild scamp of a creature as that Fermor. Our wine merchant—indeed, everybody's wine merchant; and gave capital wine, I must say. Gave more for nothing than he did for money. No fellows were entertained better. That was 'twenty or 'twenty-five. Let me see, now, which was it, dammy?" and the Peninsular colonel began to ruminate over this point, for his old memory, like his old eyes, was getting very dim. "'Twenty-five it was. I have it now, the year I got my captaincy (Sergeant, who was before me, was shot in a duel by the Spanish minister's son). Well, that Fermor soon, as you may imagine, found the wine business not to answer. He was so extravagant—nothing could stand him—and as wild as a hare. Very thick with the governor, and the governor's wife, too—a fine woman, though, but so stuck up, you know—dammy," said the colonel, excited by the memory of repulse, "there was no going within a mile of her. Why, I dined there four days in the week. Well, when I came back again, dammy if the wine business hadn't all broken up; and what do you suppose my friend was at, eh, now? What do you say, now?"

Neither Carter nor Sir John could say: nor, if they could, would they.

"Why, he had set up a little play; nothing short of that. Instead of the wine, we got—you understand—cards and chicken hazard. It was great fun. He got a lot of money out of us. He made it pay, sir. But there was always plenty to eat and drink, too. I never enjoyed myself so much."

Again the colonel took in sherry, and again the colonel's

cheeks fired out with the suddenness of the illumination of St. Peter's at Rome.

"Where was I? Well, Jack Fermor went ahead. There were some businesses, took place, I can tell you. Bless you, I could sit here until midnight, and be not half done. There was a good pigeoning—in fact (of course excepting some old friends like myself), it was *all* pigeoning. That was the way young Ascot Price was finished off. They got five thousand out of him, and he shot himself next day. Oh, Jack Fermor, he was a wonderful scamp! Wonderful!"

There was a tinge of regret in the tone with which the colonel spoke of his old friend—regret mingled with admiration at perhaps the general ill success of such gifts.

"Dammy," said the colonel, apologetically, "I believe it was a queer state of things from beginning to end; but, you see, there was nothing on the surface a gentleman could object to, and it seemed all quite square. A gentleman must find some way of filling up his time in a place like that."

Vice having paid this little act of grateful homage to Virtue, the colonel went on—

"But if Jack 'was a lad,'" went on the colonel, "what do you suppose his friend was? Now, what do you suppose his friend was?" No one, of course, could say. "We were a queer lot out at that time, I can tell you. I suppose never was there such a set got together since the days of Babylon!" (Sir John shivered a little at this unpleasant allusion.) "Well, sir, he had a friend—a quiet soul, with a wife and three little children, a decent, quiet, thoroughly good fellow, in the wine business too; and, dammy! if he didn't want to stay quietly *in* his wine, if he was only let. But he wasn't. Jack Fermor, sir, had a trick of making other fellows as like himself as two peas. Well, sir, this quiet sheep of a Manuel——"

"Manuel!" said Carter, starting.

"Manuel!" said Sir John, thinking of Miss Manuel; "how odd!"

"Didn't I tell you? What's odd?" said the colonel. "But it was odder when Jack got this creature *well* into his hands, and got his money and his savings into his hands too. He did it uncommon clever, did Jack. He was training him, he said. Well, there was another man," he went on, "who came out there on business, who had a young girl of a wife, whom he was so fond of. Dammy," said the colonel, laughing, "how we used to laugh at him! He was a Scotchman, and set up to be a

cautious, quiet, calculating rascal. But I used to go and see him very often, and so used our set, for reasons that you will perhaps understand. Eh! What d'ye say?"

And the colonel here half-closed one of his odious old eyes with exquisite meaning.

"There was about twenty years between him and this child he called his wife. She might have been his daughter five times over: so what do you suppose this stupid set himself to do? Why, he set up for being the old fellow, the fatherly dodge, and kept trying to amuse her in every way, and kept coming to us and bothering—'Now do come and see that poor child, and talk to her. She wants amusement, and I don't know *how* to amuse her.' And didn't we go? O, not at all." And here again the Peninsular half-closed his odious old eye with extraordinary significance. "And one day," he went on, "we took it into our heads to bring that wild scamp Jack Fermor. And Jack Fermor took it into *his* head one day to bring our soft friend Manuel. And our soft friend—leaving his own lady, and his two girls and one boy, at home—came very often to talk to her. Do you see what is coming now?"

The major did, or conveyed by his manner that he did. Sir John did not quite follow.

"He was the queerest young old fellow I ever saw, this Dr. Meadows (that was the Scotchman's name). He must have been close to forty then, and as stiff and hard as a ramrod. We never saw him bend, and we used to call him 'Roddy Meadows.' But it was plain that he was wild about the little white child he called his wife—infatuated, in fact; and it was plain, too, that the little chit did not care particularly for *him*. I may say, without vanity, she liked the company of your humble servant a *deu-side* deal better," added the colonel, with his favourite objectionable motion of his eye. "A lot of us used to come and sit with her for hours, and make her laugh; and I must say your humble servant didn't sit for the shortest time; no, nor he didn't drive out now and then, and walk a little on what they call their Prado! Ah! sir, those were the days for real life.

"Well, sir, I know the game old Roddy Meadows was at. It was the gratitude dodge, and the regard, you know, ripening, as they call it, into affection. I have seen life," said the colonel, laughing heartily, "and I never met *that* sort of ripening yet. It didn't ripen with him, my boy, at any rate; but," added the colonel, with a dramatic slowness and significance, "it was ripening with somebody else. O, I could go on from this till

morning about those days. There's nothing like them now. *These ain't what you can call days!* As for that fellow who writes books about *Recollections*" (this was always an irritant with the colonel), "what can *he* have to tell, dammy? Stirabout, sir! Tapioca! Gruel, gruel, sir! Ah!" said the colonel, looking almost ill with disgust, "how I hate such slops!"

Most of the colonel's friends knew that about this period he strengthened the weaker portions of his conversation with oaths more strong and frequent. They were a relief, and sent him on the faster.

"Well, about that scamp Fermor. He was soon at the end of his tether. He had got all he could get, all that was to be begged, or borrowed, or——No," said the colonel, closing the eye that was in liquor with some difficulty, but with a grotesque humour—"no; he was now coming to *that*."

"I see," said Carter, smiling.

Sir John, being a country gentleman, did not see nearly so quickly. "Coming to what?"

"Dammy!" Colonel Foley went on, "if I believe he had only the coat on his back left. He was always in and out of the Scotch fellow's house. I believe he got round the creature a good bit, and got some dollars out of him. As for the Scotch doctor's money, I needn't tell *you*, who are a man of the world, Carter" (Sir John moved a little uneasily in his chair at this rather pointed exclusion of himself from that class), "that he was not likely to pay *that* up in a hurry. And why the devil should he? But the worst was, he didn't stop there——This sherry, here, is like mother's milk to me. I am scalded with the stuff they give us at Dunkirk. As for their clarets and 'ordinary,' by the Lord, sir, it really scrapes me here——here, sir," said the colonel, laying his palm on his watch-chain. "Well, to be short about it, the Scotch fellow, who had gone to the country and wasn't to be back for a week, came back one night quite suddenly, and found——Now, what d'ye suppose he found?' And the colonel, stretching over for what he had called mother's milk, leisurely filled himself a great glass, as it were to fill up the time while the others were busy speculating. "By Jove! if he didn't find our friend Jack at his desk, stuffing his waistcoat with his notes and gold. Flat burglary, sir! All regularly planned! A most outrageous business. You see it was flag-delic; no getting over it. *There* was the real awkwardness."

"And this was Fermor?" asked Sir John, eagerly.

"No one else. The Scotchman had him pinned by the throat

in a second, and was calling in the watch. But the other was on his marrowbones whining for mercy, and I think the Scotchman would have killed him. But—and here was the best of this *con-founded* joke; I declare I went near to bursting with laughter when I heard it" (and his sausage skin went near to rupture at the bare recollection)—"Jack, with wonderful presence of mind, said if he would let him off, he would tell him something about his wife. He didn't know at the moment that something else had been packed up and carried off; you see!" added the colonel, making his jelly eye tumble backwards and forwards with extraordinary meaning. "But he did in an hour. Dammy, sir, if that smooth pious fellow Manuel hadn't gone off with the wife! and had her waiting ready at an inn outside the town. A few of the longheads had a notion of what was coming." And the colonel hinted with his awful old eye that he was one of these. "It was very bad," he went on, "very bad; for you see Manuel left his own wife and three children, and I must say," added the colonel, in a tone of moral censure, "he had no excuse, literally, *no* excuse. Positively a fine woman. Well, when the Scotchman found all this out, he was near going mad. I never saw such ridiculous nonsense. 'Dammy,' I said to him, 'what *are* you about? Don't make a snivelling donkey of yourself before the town. Take my advice, and say nothing about the business.' But no. I believe he wanted to cut the fellow's throat, and his own afterwards. He went after him for a week, hunted him, caught him, and brought him back. I think he wanted to cut him up into collops, and fry him slowly. Sir, you don't know what that family owes to me, and how they treated me! Who was it brought them through that business, that kept the thing quiet and comfortable, but Tom Foley, and perhaps Johnny Adams? The fool would have gone into the street, and poked his injuries into any man's face. I never met such a born donkey. I kept the thing down, and wrote to his relations. He swore he would have the lives of the two—and clapped them into jail. I declare to you, that gamey woman, Lady Laura, was out with us in a week, with the ice like half a foot of cold iron on the ground. Yet the fellow was no relation of *hers*, you see—no more to her than Adam. And up-on—my—salvation, sir," added the colonel, mysteriously, "Sir Thomas Dick, the Queen's own medical fellow, told me often, he didn't know the minute the thing would have come off! Well, sir, she came. She saw the Scotchman privately, was on her knees to him privately, got round him some way, told him lies, and,

what is more, got him to swallow them. And I can tell you, as I am a living man and hope to be saved—damn me!" added the colonel, with curious self-contradiction, "she worked the thing, sir, so that she got the ministers, and law, and all those infernal things out of the affair. I never heard of Manuel after. I believe he got off to America, and his widow or wife and her three brats would have starved, if the English hadn't made up a subscription for them. They got a pound of my money, I know. You *have* to put down, you know, when everybody puts down. I heard they went to England afterwards. And didn't she get round Adams and me! She was a splendid woman *then*," added the colonel, with ruminative admiration. "Quite thrown away on the poor creature they married her to! Well furnished, sir, *here*," said the colonel, with increased relish, and laying his old hands on his shirt front. "She swore both me and Adams solemnly," he added, with winery reverence, "never to breathe a word of the business. 'Pon my soul!" said the colonel, getting more and more excited, "if I had only worked my chances, I should have done well in that quarter. But the fellow that boasts of his affairs is a sneak. Still, I could tell my say as well as most men. Though," added the colonel, thoughtfully, "I found her out afterwards in a clever trick. She got me a majority in a regiment, and, dammy, sir, if I didn't find out, just in the nick of time, that they were sending it to the African coast. I should have been 'dead in a week. But she caught poor Adams in the same way, who was not so knowing as Tom Foley. She got him on some swamp duty, which made short work of him. But, after all, she was a deu-sed clever woman. Oh, deu-sed!"

Colonel Foley had not much to say on this point, and his face seemed to have grown so strained, and tightened, and inflamed—so reeking with hot vapours and turpentine spirit—that it seemed dangerous to go near him with a light. His voice, too, was growing thick, and seemed to be fighting its way to his throat through a crowd. Reverting indignantly to the military colonel who had written the Recollections, he characterised them once more, with bitter contempt, as "Slops—gruel!" and was presently assisted to a cab and sent home.

That very day Sir John Westende flew to Miss Manuel. "I have Lady Laura now," he said. "Knowing as she is, she shall be no match for me."

He then told her as much of the story as applied to the Fermors.

"I managed it uncommonly cleverly," he said. "I wormed it out of an old fellow who knows everything."

"You should be a detective, Sir John," she said, as though she were patting a horse's neck. "They should put you in the force. I shall be quite afraid of you." *

"Nonsense," he said, much pleased. "But let *her* look out. She'll find me a policeman, I can tell her. As sure as I am a living man, I shall expose her. If it comes to that, I'll go to the church door and tell the whole thing out, I will."

"She won't let it go to that," said Miss Manuel. "She is too clever. "You have the game in your own hands now, Sir John, and can play that poor woman like a fish in one of your own ponds down at Westende. How cruel you are! I am in terror of you."

"By Jove! that is what I shall do," said he, thinking he was deriving a new idea from his own mind. "I have a plan of my own, Miss Manuel. I shall play her. There is no hurry. I'll give a little more line. That's what I shall do; and pull her up with a jerk. Ha, ha! I'll teach her!"

Sir John, grumbling, and lashing himself in a sort of mulish fury, presently rose to go. When he was gone, her eyes flashed. "They are all working for me," she said; "all; but no matter. They are all converging to the one point. The end is not far away, and it will be soon time to gather up the threads." She knew very well who Colonel Foley's Scotch Doctor Meadows was, and where he was to be found. Then she thought tenderly, but exultingly, of the loved and lost darling that she fancied was looking down on her as she advanced on this course, and whose soft gentle soul she strangely believed would be soothed and propitiated—like some cruel heathen idol—by bloody human sacrifices. Presently another visitor entered, when a soft light passed over her face, and the ruthless spirit she was fondling in her arms disengaged itself and fled away. It was Young Brett.

CHAPTER THE SIXTY-FIFTH.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD.

YOUNG BRETT had got up once more to London, and had driven from the train to his lodgings, and from his lodgings straight to Alfred-place. He was delighted to see Miss Manuel

once more, and almost gambolled round her like a faithful terrier, as he was. "I am *so* glad to see you again," he said, "and to see you so well. Our colonel has given me a month. Some of our fellows were making a jolly party to go over and see the camp at Châlons, and the colonel wished me to be with them, but I begged hard to come here, and I am *so* glad, dear Miss Manuel."

She was quite touched at this friendly interest. "You are a good dear boy," she said. "You have been true to me all through—yes, *all* through, and I never shall forget it—never!"

There was a little falter in her voice, and Young Brett darted away from the subject obstreperously.

"The worst is," he said, wistfully, "I am so stupid, I am getting so stupid—I am not clever at doing things. I don't know the way. But now, dear Miss Manuel, here I am. I want to be trained. It will be a charity and a kindness to use me, it will indeed; just to send me about, you know, of messages and that sort of thing. I delight in the excitement, 'pon my word I do!"

Miss Manuel smiled on him. "I have given you enough work for this year, after that Welsh expedition."

"Well," said he, "I don't think I managed *that* so badly. 'Jove! when I came down first I thought there was a regular mystery, but it turned out very pleasantly. Even that, however, I can take no credit for, for it was really an accident. By the way, that Carter," and Young Brett began to grow hot, and colour at the mention of the name, "what has become of him? I never told you the things he said—though, indeed, I ought not to mention it now."

Her eyes glittered. "I know what he said to you as well as if I was standing by and listening. I know what vile things he could say and do. But his time is shortening." She got up and began to walk. "There are people on his track. It is too soon to tell you everything; but this I will say, that though it seems long since our darling left us, still no one has been sleeping, nor have we forgotten this vile cruel heart, who helped to send her so early to her grave. I am weak, I know, and only a woman, but trust me. I have said it should be Never Forgotten, and it shall be! And I tell you all is nearly ready, and the moment is fast drawing on!"

For the first time she looked steadily at Young Brett for enthusiasm and eagerness, but instead, she saw blank dismay and a sort of hopeless grief. This youth showed everything in his

face. "You *don't* tell me this, Miss Manuel," he said, imploringly. "Oh no! Why, this *is* what he said, and dared to say of you."

"He did!" she said, triumphantly. "Ah! then he has instinct already of what is coming. But he shan't escape. Never! Neither he, nor the other, the *real* murderer, nor the real murderer's wife! We can reach them all, *are* reaching them, and shall overtake them in a very little time! You can help me still, as you have helped me so well."

Again she gave him that triumphant look, expecting encouragement. But Young Brett's eyes were on the ground, and there was a sore wounded expression in his face.

"Oh then it is true, it is *all* true!" he said, mournfully. "Oh, Miss Manuel, it has come like a blow upon me. I told him to his face that it was all false—and indeed I *wish* it had been all false——"

"What," said Miss Manuel, "and would you have me sit down quietly and submit? I should have died a year ago if I had. Are there laws and punishments to meet crimes like this? No. We must take it into our own hands, and punish for ourselves."

"But you don't mean it," said Young Brett, in a sort of agony. "No, I know you don't. It is so dreadful to think of. And the poor girl, who has done no harm in the world, and done us no harm. Oh, there is something shocking in it. And you who are so noble, and so much above us all, and whom I would do anything in the wide world for, *to have* such an idea, I *can't* believe it."

Miss Manuel looked at him scornfully. "Are you beginning to be like the rest?" she said. "Very well. It is only being deceived in one more."

"I know I am very stupid," said he, still in this tone of despair, "and very useless. I only mean well, and do my best. But, in this sort of thing, I should be miserable all my life, I *know* I should. It is awful to think of. A young wife, Miss Manuel, to be ruined in this way! Oh, you must think again, do, *do* think again, dearest Miss Manuel, and say—you are joking."

Miss Manuel *did* feel a sort of self-reproach then. She was silent for a few moments. "Ah, *you* have not lost a sister, and cannot feel. No matter. I was only mistaken. I thought I was secure of you, at least. You were faithful to me. Now I must only go on by myself." Suddenly her voice changed;

there came a touching sweetness and affection into her tone. "Ah! But I understand, and do not mean what I say. It is natural in you. You are too noble, and too good for this vile pursuit. It is horrible. But it is my life. I have lived for nothing else. I may as well go on now. I *must* go on, even if I sacrifice everything that loves me, or cares for me."

He shook his head sadly. He seemed to stagger under some blow. "I would do anything for you, Miss Manuel," he said, sadly, "anything. I think at this moment, if you wanted it, I would go into a house on fire, or—anything of that sort. But this young girl—to destroy her, or stand by and see it—Oh! it would be before me day and night." And Young Brett mournfully took his hat. "And that man Romaine, your friend—Oh, I am afraid, Miss Manuel, I see it all now."

"Don't leave me," said she. "Ah! don't give me up. *That* is only wanting to finish it. Though, perhaps, it is better to have done with everybody that is good."

"I know I am not," said Young Brett, in growing excitement, "as good as I ought to be. And I don't set up as being anything of a saint, like some of our fellows; but—but—if this is—to go on—I must—I *must*. Oh, Miss Manuel, if you will only promise me to give up this dreadful scheme——"

"Very well," said she, proudly, "you *won't* understand me, then. Well, I am grieved; but no matter. As for giving up—no, no. You would have me give up my life. Give up my prayers. Give up the only atonement I can make to our lost darling. Ah! no, no!"

"Atonement to *her*," said Young Brett, more excitedly, "why, it is enough to bring her sweet soul back again to earth. Why, you know, Miss Manuel, it is in *defiance* of her last sweet prayers and wishes, on the very morning that she left us."

Miss Manuel stopped suddenly in her walk, and came up close to him.

"Her last wishes!" she said. "What do you mean?"

"You know," he said; "of course you do! What she sent to Hanbury."

"Sent to Hanbury?" she said, turning pale, and her large eyes straining at Young Brett, "what did she send to Hanbury?"

"Ah, Miss Manuel," he said, "you would not go in the face of her last dear piteous words, written that very Sunday morning. He showed them to me before he sealed them up and sent them to you."

"What is all this?" said Miss Manuel. "I know nothing of it. There is some dreadful thing that has been concealed from me. Tell it to me all—tell it to me all—at once, and quickly!"

She was so frantic and agitated, that he became alarmed and agitated too. He told her how, about a week after that Sunday, Hanbury had come to him with a letter of Violet's, written on the morning of her death, begging forgiveness for the suffering she had caused him, and hoping that Fermor and his wife, should he ever choose one, would live happily; and conjuring him as a last favour, never to think of doing anything in the way of avenging her trials or her death. And further, to see that no one else did. This was the substance of Violet's last letter."

"Good God!" said Miss Manuel, sinking into a chair. "This was never sent to me, never told to me. Where is it? Who has it?"

"Hanbury. He gave it to me to send to you the very morning I saw him off at the docks. And indeed I am sure I posted it: indeed I am. Though I am so stupid and clumsy sometimes——" And he stopped and looked round ruefully as this suspicion crossed him.

"Run to him! fly to him! said she, starting up. "Bring him here. Don't lose a moment. Bring him here at once."

He rushed away. By a cruel perverseness, he could not find Hanbury, though he sought him all day long. He left a note for him at a club; and there late in the afternoon, when Hanbury was glancing at a paper with a dull interest, a servant came, and said a lady was at the door in her carriage, and wished to see him.

By an instinct, he knew that it was Miss Manuel, and came out quickly.

"Will you get in?" she said, "I want to talk to you."

He was struck with the sudden look of anxious inquiry that had taken up its place in her face, and got in without a word. They drove away. "You are doing too much," he said; "you will make yourself ill again."

"The letter!" she said, suddenly. "What about this letter? I never heard of it. You never spoke of it. Why didn't you? Show it to me."

He knew at once what she meant. For him, as there had been but one Violet, so there was but one letter, and that associated with her.

"Why, I sent it to you the morning I sailed," he said, hurriedly.

"Never reached me, never," she said, wringing her hands despairingly. "Oh, where is it? Drive to your house."

"I have it here," said Hanbury, sadly, taking out his pocket-book. "What I sent was a copy. Here is her own dear writing, soft, sweet, and delicate, like herself."

His voice was trembling, and his fingers were trembling yet more, as he put the writing into her hand. It was as though her gentle spirit had risen up between them. Pauline's eyes swam as she looked on the little pale characters. It may be given here—her last appeal, written on that last Sunday morning :—

"DEAR JOHN HANBURY,—They are gone out this morning for a few minutes. I feel happier and a little stronger. I have never been able to tell you how miserable I felt at all the suffering I caused your kind and generous heart; but I was a foolish, thoughtless girl, not so wicked as perhaps I seemed. I saw in your eyes yesterday that you had forgiven me. Let me ask something else, too. Charles will marry and be happy. I so wish, dear John Hanbury, that he and she whom he shall marry may continue happy, and that no wish of punishment or retribution shall ever interfere with them. I know you will do this for me, and add to the proofs of that love you have shown me, and which I have so unworthily—— But I must stop here; and, dear John Hanbury, God bless you for ever! as you deserve.

"VIOLET."

Streaming eyes read this letter. The sweet name Violet was written faintly, and in letters that tottered. Her spirit seemed to flutter gently across the paper. Miss Manuel kissed it frantically, and the next moment it fell from her hands.

"My God!" she said; "*it is all too late!*"

CHAPTER THE SIXTY-SIXTH.

CATCHING AT STRAWS.

SHE first flew to Mrs. Fermor, but found that she was out. They did not know where she had gone. Never were there such agitated moments. "Drive quickly, drive quickly!" she cried out to her coachman. But whither? She knew not whom to look for, or whom to find. Romaine, the Destroyer—whom (as she thought with a sort of stab at her heart) *she* had turned loose—he must be found. He was not at his club, not likely to be at his house, was at Richmond, perhaps. She drove to his chambers—he actually *was* in. She flew up-stairs into his room.

"Here is a surprise!" he cried out; "I should rather say an honour, should I not? Though the other day your young friend, that pretty little wife, presented herself, and—Why, has anything happened?"

No wonder he put the question, for she looked in deep distress. "It is about her," she said, a little wildly; "and I have come to you to appeal to you—to your generosity. I have been very foolish, very wicked, I should say (that is to say, I did not know then what I know now). And I want you to do me a favour, the only one I have ever asked you."

Mr. Romaine shook his head and smiled. "I never make wild promises. But let us hear. We shall see."

"But you must; you won't refuse," said Pauline, desperately, seeing in this answer a hint of what she was to expect. "It is too serious to be trifled with. It will be dreadful if something is not done; and oh, Romaine, I conjure you listen to me; I tell you I want to repair a wicked folly of mine, and you only can do it. You must never see this poor child again, or, at least, not speak to her."

"My dear lady," he said, "let me remind you of the century we live in. Think of the railways, and the telegraph, and Exhibitions. We can't do these sort of things without being ridiculous. Think, I beg of you."

"Oh, but *you* must not talk in this way," said she, half frantically. "You don't know what is coming, or how it will end. Do promise me. You must."

"How it will end!" said he, musingly; "no, I don't. Though I may guess. Why, how unreasonable this is! Was it

not you, pray, that first pointed me out this little woman, and spurred me on with some of those little sharp satirical speeches, for which Miss Manuel is so deservedly admired? Upon my word, it almost amounted to a challenge."

"It did, indeed," said Pauline, covering her face. "I own it. It was wicked, horrible, but I thought I was doing right. I did indeed. I want to make reparation, and you must let me, before it is too late."

"Too late!" he said, gloomily; "it is too late. You should have come before. These are dangerous games, Miss Manuel. I say it is too late. I have no power in the matter; I cannot stop myself now; a week ago perhaps—Yes, my life has been hitherto rough and cold, and perhaps heartless. *Now*, I feel a glimpse of sunshine. I have not a strong will. I can't do these violent heroic actions, and I don't want to, now—I confess it."

He spoke sternly and excitedly, and in his face she read there was no hope for what she prayed. In great agitation she cried out—

"You cannot mean this—so frightful—so wicked a thing! Oh, think what a judgment will come on you if——"

"I tell you, Miss Manuel, this wickedness is not mine. I should never have dreamed of it. On their heads be it who forced it on me. I am a selfish, common sort of human savage. I can't do these fine things. I could, perhaps, ten years ago. What made you defy me? No one ever did that without danger. Don't be angry if I tell you I saw your skilful game."

"Oh," said Pauline, with a half groan, "what *am* I to do? What shall I do?"

"It is too late," he went on, gloomily. "And I don't see how she can be saved. *He* is a low, brutal fellow, and has dared to give me some of his airs. I see he will be insolent in a few hours, and I must give him a lesson. Like the true savages that we are, he is 'taking it out' of her. He will cringe before me. Poor helpless child. She says she has not one to look to. A ruffian husband, a cold father, and the friend that she loved, and watched over, turning out to be—shall we say—a secret enemy? Is it any wonder that she should come for assistance to the only one who, in his rude way, seems to have some regard for her, poor little soul?"

"Oh, what shall I do?" said Pauline, in a tempest of agitation. "Oh, if on my knees——"

"Hush! hush!" said Mr. Romaine, rising up. "Think of

the nineteenth century, I beg. Why, we seem to be at the Porte St. Martin. Come, come, Miss Manuel, pull down your veil, and let me see you down respectfully to your brougham."

He did see her down. "God give me strength and quick intelligence," she said—almost gasped—to herself as she drove away. "Sweet Violet—saint! angel!—look down and pray for me! We shall help her yet."

Alas! It seemed that supernatural aid were indeed required!

Then Miss Manuel drove away to try again if she could find Mrs. Fermor. She went up-stairs with a fluttering heart. Mrs. Fermor was sitting alone, with pale cheeks, and eyes that seemed to "stare" a little from wakefulness. She had long been expecting this moment—panting for it.

Miss Manuel ran up to her. The hand she took in hers was damp and cold. "You are ill," she said, alarmed; "what is the matter?"

The cold little hand drew itself away hastily. "You ask," said Mrs. Fermor, with a trembling voice. "Is this what you have come to ask about?"

"Oh, indeed it is," said Miss Manuel, hurriedly. "I have come to accuse myself, and to throw myself at your feet, and beg your forgiveness for what I have done. I was mad. I knew not what I was doing. I conjure you not to mind what I said and what I did. It is my own work, I know, but I may still save you."

"Save me!" said Mrs. Fermor, bitterly; "this is indeed good news. How noble! And how is that to be done?"

"Ah, you suspect me!" said Pauline, sadly. "No wonder. No one seems to heed me now. But I must speak, and speak out. Fly! shun him. Never speak to him again. I know him, and know what he means."

"Who do you mean?" said Mrs. Fermor, astonished.

"Romaine! I conjure you never speak to him again. I understand his hints, for I know him well; and I have come straight to you from him, to put you on your guard against him."

"Ah, now I understand you, Miss Manuel," said Mrs. Fermor, with flashing eyes. "Now I see. So you come to lecture me, too, about that. But I can understand who has inspired you. You follow your instructions to the letter. Mr. Romaine! With what face can you come and speak to me in this tone? Ah, I know you now, Miss Manuel! There are other people I

am to be on my guard against God help me! God help me! I have no friends."

"Dear, dear girl!" said Pauline, rushing to her, "some one has been poisoning your mind against me. I know I was wicked at the beginning, but I have repented. Oh, you know not how I have suffered. But whatever suspicion I bring on myself, I say again solemnly, and conjure you solemnly, shun that dreadful being, whom I know means you harm!"

"I know those who mean me harm," said Mrs. Fermor, with trembling voice. "I know them well. I know who are my friends, too. I want no advice. I am glad you have come, so that I can tell you so. Henceforth I can stand by myself. I shall be independent of friends and of the world. I want no false ones. So now leave me, please, Miss Manuel."

She stood up. Pauline came towards her and tried to catch her hand.

"Don't, don't," she said; "for heaven's sake don't take this tone! Think of me, speak to me as you will, but take care, I conjure you. Do let me know that I have repaired what I have done."

The little lady, with heaving chest and quivering lip, looked at her with scorn.

"If you do not go, I must," she said. "It is not fit that you should come to this house."

At this moment the servant opened the door, and announced "Mr. ROMAINE!"

CHAPTER THE SIXTY-SEVENTH.

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

HE entered with his old easy air, and never even started as he saw the two ladies together.

"Ah, this is a surprise," he said, taking his low chair. "Two visits rolled into one. Miss Manuel, you must know, *did me the unexpected honour of a call not an hour ago*, and we meet again here!"

What with confusion and grief, Miss Manuel was not herself

any longer. She had lost her old readiness and her old sharpness of retort. Not so Mrs. Fermor, who displayed a wild and hurried coquetry.

"I am so glad you have come in, Mr. Romaine," she said. "I was expecting you."

"And I have been looking up a dress for you," he said; "for you must go to this show of Mamma Fermor's. I brought some pictures from that shop in the Haymarket. Here is a Spanish Ballerina, a Mary Queen of Scots—the old, old story. Or, what do you say to a genuine pair, Petrarch and Laura?"

With her eyes fixed defiantly on Miss Manuel, and her lips brought close, Mrs. Fermor answered *her* rather than Romaine.

"Whatever you like; *you* will settle it for me."

"Well," he said, carelessly, "I am for Petrarch and Laura. I can get this made for myself. It will suit my style of beauty famously."

"Anything you like," said she, vacantly, still answering Miss Manuel. "Choose for me."

"Well, I do choose," he said. "But first, what does Miss Manuel—our friend—say?"

With a helpless despairing look she turned from one to the other.

"What *can* I say? she said; "I know nothing of what you mean. It cannot be serious——" And she almost wrung her hands.

"It is serious," said Mrs. Fermor, looking at her fixedly; "and all real and earnest. Childish days are over, Miss Manuel. I feel more and more like a woman every day. I *want* to be a woman of the world. I am panting to begin. A real, cold, heartless woman of the world, that has got rid of foolish affection, and of love and scruples, and all that old absurdity. I must begin to live now," added the poor little Mrs. Fermor, with a piteous desperation, and almost with tears starting to her eyes, "if ever I *am* to live!"

"Then let it be my task, O divinest Laura," said Mr. Romaine, starting up into a theatrical attitude, "to teach thee this new art. Thy Petrarch is indifferently skilled in worldly politics, and will be a guide, philosopher, and friend. There, Miss Manuel. Not so bad, I think. We shall make a sensation in our pew parts at Mamma Fermor's."

No, no, no! "said Pauline; "this is all folly, mere childish folly. You do not see the danger. Come! come!" she half whispered to Mrs. Fermor, "ah! come with me. You will not

refuse me that little favour? I implore you. I have something to say to you. Come out and drive."

Mrs. Fermor broke from her. "That is *all* over now. I shall not go to you, nor do I want you to come to me. I know you. You have cured me, indeed."

"I tell you it will be ruin, misery, degradation," said Pauline, frantically.

He caught the last words. "What, *you* rehearsing too, Miss Manuel?" he said, with a sneer. "Has Lady Laura secured you, too! How strongly cast we shall be! But come, no tampering with the lovely Laura. I know what Miss Manuel is whispering. She has played the same part with me this morning already."

"I dare say!" said Mrs. Fermor, with cheeks kindling afresh. "I have lived but a short time, but I have learnt enough to see what the world is."

"Well! I started," said he, "with the assumption that every friend was false, every truth (that is, every worldly truth) a lie—and every profession a humbug. You have now convinced me that it was so. Sometimes you meet with an agreeable surprise, but ninety-nine times out of a hundred I am right. You must come to school to *me*, my dear Mrs. Fermor."

There was a passion and a tragic intensity in all that the two women spoke to *each other* that would have mystified any one else. But Mr. Romaine knew what was on foot. For him the situation was delightful. Mrs. Fermor, so full of indignant warmth, her cheeks glowing with wounded pride and defiance; Miss Manuel piteously imploring, both in looks and voice.

Her last hope was to be alone with this young creature; then she could tell her all, and make even an abject submission. She would do *anything* to stop this horrible mischief, which now seemed to her to be spreading every hour like some virulent plague. But Romaine seemed to understand this also.

"This is one of my idle lounging evenings," he said, looking at her steadily; "for a wonder, I have nothing to do. Business, thank God, I never dirty my fingers with. But there are a hundred little gnats which come buzzing at me, nearly as bad as business—notes and the like. But this afternoon I am free. Come, Mrs. Fermor, shall we order tea? Let us drown our cares in a cheerful bowl."

Mrs. Fermor flew to comply with his wish with an artificial alacrity—still looking at Miss Manuel. The other saw there was no hope, and went away full of sadness, something like

despair. Never was there such a changed being. She had sprung back over the wide crevasse that lay between her and the old Eastport times, and was the gentle loving upright Pauline again. What she had been doing seemed to be the blackest of crimes, a spotted leprosy. "Oh, what *am* I to do!" she said aloud, in her carriage. "And I can do nothing."

At this moment she saw Fermor sauntering along moodily. This was now the shape in which most people saw him. In an instant she had stopped her carriage by the pathway, and called to him. He was at her window in a moment.

"Oh, Captain Fermor!" she said, and he remarked her excited manner, "I have just been to your house, and I want to speak to you, to tell you—And yet," she added, striking her dress passionately, "how am I to begin—or where—But you will grant me this one favour. I know—I am sure you will?"

The old complacent smile was rising on the Fermor lips. Passers-by, reading his face, thought what a pleasant little interview was going on at the window of that little brougham boudoir.

"Anything you wish," he said. "You have only to ask. Come, what is it?"

"You do not understand," she said, in the same passionate way. "Something must be done, and done at once, or we know not what mischief may come. I am accountable for it all! I have been guilty and wicked; but I declare solemnly I knew not what I was doing. You will be generous, and save me, I know. Fly! leave this country! leave me. Put the seas between us. It is the only chance. And take *her* with you. She must not be sacrificed."

He was amazed. "Put the seas between us!" he said. "Pray why? And *you* ask me to do this?"

"I do! I do!" she said. "I would repair the mischief I have done. I should have kept away from your household, but some miserable fate has driven me on. I thought I was doing what was right; but I was blind—stone blind—and I was wicked, too. But you will go?"

(Other passers-by now looking in curiously, and seeing Pauline's sparkling eyes, said within themselves, "Here is a gallant little quarrel going on in this public-private place.")

He shook his head. There was a bewildered pleasure beaming in his eyes. "Anything but that," he said. "You can't ask me that. I could not do it. It is hard to ask me. Now, too, when

we are beginning to know each other, and to *understand* each other."

"Ah, that is it!" she said, with a groan. "You don't understand me. No one does. No one knows what I am, or what I have been doing. I dare not even hint it to you. But I tell you, it is the only chance for me. You will go, will you not?"

Again the look of triumph was in his eye. "You know," he said, "my position. I am only a slave in that house. I can neither go nor stay. They bought me, and I must stand by the terms of the bargain."

She seemed to see this, and covered her face up in her hands. (A man passing, who had read a good deal of French romance at his club, looked back with extraordinary interest, and thought it very like a scene in the "*Ames Perdus*," by Charles Loupgarou.)

"Then we are lost," she said, despairingly, "all of us!" She told the coachman to drive on.

"Wait, wait," said he, hastily; "we shall see. We must talk of this—I must see you——"

"Think! Talk! See!" she said, angrily. "There has been too much of *that*. We must *do* now—act. But it is all too late."

Miss Manuel went home miserable, and almost distracted. In her drawing-room she flung herself on the sofa with her face to the cushions. "What *am* I to do?" she groaned. "Some curse is on me. Some fury is driving me onward."

So it seemed, indeed. She was so bound up, so encompassed about, she could not dare turn back. An iron fate, cruel and pitiless as ever was in a Greek tragedy, was hurrying her on. She thought of the soft suffering face of her lost sister, as it lay before her on that final, far-off Sunday morning.

"Fool that I was," said Pauline, in a fresh agony, "wicked fool! to have thought that so sweet a soul could have required to be soothed or laid by savage and unchristian vengeance," and she shuddered as she thought of the awful character of the retribution she had heaped on the head of that poor artless, impetuous, but innocent Mrs. Fermor. "What *is* to be done?" she said, distractedly. "Who is there to help me?" Who indeed! Not one in *that* house, not her brother, who was watching jealously, suspiciously, and now panting for prompter vengeance.

There was scarcely an equivoque here, such as takes place in a play; for she could not bring herself to tell Fermor how she had been behaving to his wife. Nor, in fact, would she have cared

now, had she even suspected the view he took of her agitated requests. Every other consideration was sunk in the one aim and object—the undoing of what she had done. Talk of a skeleton in a cupboard! Here was a decaying, mouldering corpse, locked up decomposing, and mottled over with the black spots of a plague. Day and night she could not shut out the image of that pretty, impetuous, fresh young creature, whose ruin she had so craftily—“devilishly,” she said to herself—planned.

Motion—action was her only resource. At home there was no hope. Those gloomy eyes of her brother—now more gloomy and more truculent than ever—were upon her. They were suspicious, and brought her to account. Hanbury she saw again.

“What *can* you do for me?” she said, almost on her knees. “Help me! Save me! You once loved us, and loved *her*. Oh, I dare not tell you what I have done. You cannot guess it even, and you will not ask it. But you will help me—help *her*—save that poor child!”

In such wild accusations John Hanbury had no faith. She was one of his Saints. He thought long and wistfully of what he was to do.

“I would give the world,” he said, earnestly, “and not the world only—for *that* would be no sacrifice—but my blood, heart, life—everything for you! But I am not quick at planning. If I saw her—that poor girl——”

“Ah, yes!” said Pauline, eagerly, “she will trust *you*, she will listen to *you*. Speak to her in your own natural honest way, and she will listen. She has not this horrible distrust of you, though, indeed, it is not her fault. It is only natural that she should shrink from me.”

“Ah!” said Hanbury, sadly, “if she only knew her interest, she would fly to you, she would——”

“No, no,” said she, hastily; “she is right there. You do not know me either. I am not a woman for the young and innocent to fly to.”

Hanbury’s eyes were turned on her, wondering and inquiring. This was her too scrupulous self-accusation—sister to *his* Saint up above!

“You will go to her,” went on Pauline. “Get them away—secretly; get them to leave this dreadful London. All of them—father, husband, all. It is the only chance. I know that wicked Romaine; his Will gives him power. He has done everything that he has laid out, and he has laid *this* out. Go

quickly," she said, hurriedly, and in terror, as if it might be already too late. "Persuade her. See her father. He wishes to leave this place. Conjure her, and she will heed you."

John Hanbury left her, and, full of ardour, flew to carry out his new mission.

CHAPTER THE SIXTY-EIGHTH.

FERMOR'S NEXT MOVE.

TWO approaching events were now mildly agitating the society of which Major Carter and Lady Laura Fermor were members. One was the marriage of the major with Mrs. Wrigley, the other, the festival Lady Laura was about to give. In conversation, the first was despatched with many sneers. Eyebrows were elevated together, with the accuracy of drill, as the subject was introduced. Webster, with his face to his plate, and never sacrificing a mouthful to his joke, snapped off his sharp petards, and said he was glad of it, because now their united weight would break down the old chariot. Still there were not a few who growled, and who said "that Carter" was a "something" lucky fellow, that he had fallen on his legs, that he knew (satanically) well where a good thing was to be got, and how to get it, with more in the same key of approbation.

No wonder the latter was a little elated, the world was "going so pleasantly" with him. He was cleaner and crisper and brighter than before. The moment of his happiness was not ten days off. Lady Laura's festival was a day or two later, which he lamented much. "We shall be miles away," he said, half sadly, "by that time. We shall be at Dover, or perhaps at Calais. I am sorry to miss it; indeed I am." This he said to Fermor, whom he met in Pall-Mall. "The world," he went on, "has been going very well with me; better, indeed, than such an old sinner as I deserve. But the world is an old sinner too, my dear Fermor, and I suppose has some reason."

Fermor was in one of his fits of irritation. During these latter days he was in a strange excitement. He had just come from Miss Manuel's, where he had not been admitted. "Going pleasantly with you?" he said; "it is more than I can say. I am crossed and worried at every turn. Not but that, if I chose, I could be independent of it, and right myself."

The major laughed good humouredly. "We poor genteel paupers must take what comes in our way, and be glad. But, my dear boy, to hear *you* railing at the world, with a goose full of golden eggs at home—ha! ha!—and, yourself in the best society; and that charming, piquant Mrs. Fermor (I am an old fellow, you know, and may speak), why really——"

Fermor bit his lips several times before he could speak. "Charming and piquant!" he said, scornfully. "Oh, of course."

"I declare I am so grieved," went on the major, at having to go, and at not being able to see her. She will make a genuine sensation. Mark, I say so."

"Sensation! where?" said Fermor, absently.

"In the tableaux at Lady Laura's. That rough fellow, Romaine, is at work night and day organising it."

Fermor stopped short in the street and looked at the other. "Who told you this?" he said.

"The world," said the major. "The town. Ah! my dear friend, I see! A little secret from the husband. A surprise on the night itself."

"This is monstrous! this is outrageous!" he muttered.

The major's face suddenly altered. "Forgive me," he said; "I speak of these things too lightly. I did not mean it. Seriously, I *am* sorry about it. We are old friends, and I am an 'old boy,' as they call me; so you won't mind me. But you know these young creatures are always a little giddy, until they settle down."

"What am I to do?" asked Fermor, walking on. "I think I shall go straight to that ruffian's house, and strike him across the face. I should like to mark him. His insolence is unendurable."

"He is overbearing," said the major, warmly, "and a low fellow. But, my dear Fermor, you must not do anything extravagant. There is really no harm in the business."

"No harm," said Fermor, fiercely, "in being talked of by the low gossips of the town, and being pointed at, and shrugged at? I won't stand it. I am putting up with too much. Everybody thinks they can treat me as they please. I tell you, since this marriage of mine, I have never had a day's comfort, and I believe I have to thank you and other good friends for it."

"Don't say that," said the major, calmly. "I think you do me injustice. A little reflection will show that you do. I put myself a good deal out of my way to help in that business;

and, do you know, I trace a chronic rheumatism I have in this left arm to that cold night's journey up to London!"

Fermor was a little ashamed. "I know," he said, "and of course I did not mean——But it would have been better, after all, to have kept to that poor girl. She would have adored me, I believe, and have made me very happy."

The major shook his head.

"Never would have done," he said. "That you know yourself. All very well for the romantic part; but otherwise——"

"Well, otherwise," said Fermor, impatiently. "Why not?"

"Society, I mean," said the major. "There's the droll thing of Miss Manuel, with her partics and her followers, and all the world—that is, a certain set of the world—struggling to get to them. But have you ever remarked, no ladies, eh?"

"Yes," said Fermor, "I have. But why not? She does not care for ladies."

"Ah! all very well," said the major, whose face was gradually contracting, and assuming a sharp and malicious expression. "That does to give out, you know. She has taken some dislike to me, mainly, I believe, because I did conceive it to be my duty, in that affair of her sister's; and I cannot describe to you the unchristian attempts she has made to injure me. Thanks to Providence, I have been enabled to defeat them without much exertion. But of course I am under no obligation to cushion the thing, and when asked, therefore, I always tell the thing openly."

"But what thing?" said Fermor. "What do you mean?"

"Did I never tell you?" said the major, his face contorting more and more with malice. "No, I believe not. You never heard such a story, such a business altogether. You know I make no profession of being a friend of the Manuels. I always had the one opinion. I am, therefore, under no restraint. Such a disgraceful affair—very bad indeed! Let me see. The old colonel is in Town now. We are sure to find him, for he lives all day, and nearly all night, at his club. He would tell you the whole story in half an hour, and would like to tell it."

"And I should like to hear it," said Fermor, bitterly. "The Manuels give themselves great airs, and Miss Manuel, latterly, if she had been a princess, could not behave more haughtily."

"Exactly," said Major Carter, vindictively. "I don't dislike her, though she has injured me; but then I am under no obligation to go out of my way to bolster up her family affairs;" and the major at that moment, thinking of Miss Manuel's per-

secution of himself, and of his own trouble to defeat it, was actually colouring. "I will introduce you to Foley—you would like to know Foley—and *he* has heard of you."

During these days Miss Manuel, in a strange state of mind, felt herself drawn in the smooth current on to the rapids. She seemed to be catching at the branches and stones as they passed her. It was of no avail. She went abroad to the shows and amusements, not from any love of such attractions, but because they might offer opportunities of undoing her fatal work. But it was going on too surely and rapidly. Once during these days she met Mrs. Fermor, and, with a wistful and imploring look, ran to her; but, trembling and flushed, the other turned from her. Much oftener she met her with Mr. Romaine—Romaine the Victorious. Him, at some ball or theatre one night, she caught hold of and talked to hurriedly.

"What do you mean to do?" said she. "How is this to end?"

"How can I tell?" he said, calmly. "You know me sufficiently by this time to guess that what I mean to-day may not be what I mean to-morrow. But this I am certain of: what I feel at this moment to that young girl."

"But you have conscience—you have honour," said she, almost frantically. "I cannot believe that you would go so far——"

"Ah, yes!" he said. "That is not the difficulty. I don't care to boast, but I have lived stormily—according to the odd French expression, have had a *jeunesse orageuse*. I could count on my fingers certainly three or four instances nearly the same, and I knew what I meant then, and how far I intended to go. Apply that to the present instance. I am a hard, cold, selfish being; I confess it. For years I have not known what it is to live or love. Now, when I feel the rays of the sun upon me, you would push me into shade. Nonsense. My dear Miss Manuel, you are laughing at me—behind your cards—behind your fan. You threw down a clever challenge; you are beaten, and now you want to try another system. It will not do. I have but one thing in my head now, and I shall follow it out to the last, as I have done everything else in my life."

She almost groaned. "O, Heaven help me, and forgive me! Heaven help *her*, as indeed it will!" But her rash purpose was being worked out without her, and in spite of her: the old wrong would find a punishment for itself, and would be, indeed, *Never Forgotten*.

These were weary miserable days. She lay under a load of

remorse. All the time her strange brother kept her under his eye suspiciously. "What is this change?" he said. "You do not see people. Why do you not let them come? Why do you not see him as you used to do? Take care, Pauline; I am getting tired. I don't follow these fine schemes of yours." She felt that she dare not tell him what she knew, or dream even of changing his purpose; so she could only plead for delay, for a little longer time. "A week or two more," she said, "and you shall see. I conjure you do nothing of yourself. You promised, you know, to leave all to me."

"Ah, Romaine," said he, with some satisfaction, "he is doing his work. You have managed that well. I must give you so much credit. But for Fermor, we are far too slow with him. I cannot bring my eyes to look at him when we meet. I find this growing on me every day. You remember what you called him that night, when *she* was still in the house—a murderer. It was the exact description, and now, go where I will, by night or by day, I always have him present to me as a murderer."

Miss Manuel groaned to herself, and covered up her face. She was thinking how every step had plunged her deeper; every move had been but too fatally calculated to prevent her going back. The only course now was to prevent this wild, excitable brother from taking things into his own hands; and she, therefore, with a desperate hypocrisy, conjured, implored him to leave *all* to her.

But all this time there was a great manly heart bound up in the Manuel family by all the ties of strong grief, and tender regrets, and softest associations, and whose state was as miserable as that of Pauline herself. The tones and colouring of the younger Hanbury had faded with that deep trial and the schooling of rough travel; the old dream of the goodness of all men, and the unsuspecting trust, which at times looks like folly, had been scorched out. A graver, sadder, and more practical Hanbury had come home. Now it seemed to him that old wounds were opened afresh. Yet he knew not how to meet the evil. At devising he had no skill; yet one evening, relying on his own honest instincts for assistance, he thought he would go straight to the bright impulsive little woman, whom he always looked at with a strange, sad interest, from her having stepped into the place of one he could never forget.

He was coming down the street, when he saw Romaine standing on the steps, looking in his direction. Romaine waited for him. "My good Hanbury," he said, "I have an

instinct you are coming in here. Am I right? I thought so. Now, what can you want in this gallery? I give you fair notice I am come for a private audience, and you will only be in the way."

Hanbury said to him, sadly, "Ah! why do *you* come here? It is not prudent nor right. Surely you, who are in the world, know how the world talks. I know I have no title to speak to you, but——"

"Well," said Romaine, "you have saved me from some embarrassment by that speech; some such misty notion was in my head, but I was too polite to utter it. Seriously, my good friend Hanbury, what are *you at* on these hall-door steps? Only that I know you to be a good sort of well-meaning fellow that intends no harm, why really I should be inclined to——" and he nodded his head significantly. "But the point now is, I am going in here, and I trust you will have the good taste not to come in too."

"I say again," said Hanbury, firmly, "this should not go on. It is unworthy of you, Romaine—unworthy of any man of honour, especially when you know the state of things in this house. Come away with me down, and let us talk over it quietly. Come."

The look of calm insolence that Romaine gave him was unsurpassed. "I am beginning to understand you, Mr. Hanbury; and it is time that you should understand me. Let me remind you that our acquaintance does not quite warrant this tone of confidential remonstrance. I once 'went out,' as it is called, with a benevolent Frenchman—a religious man, too—for a similar friendly remonstrance, which, not being a friend, he had no business to make. You understand. Religious man as he was, he *did* meet me, and recollected it well afterwards."

"This sort of tone has no effect on me," said Hanbury; "I have been in situations where I have shown no regard for life. It has often been a burden to me. I want no quarrel with you; but I tell you plainly, this must not go on!"

"This is far more rational," said Romaine, good humouredly; "much better than the platitudes you began with. Now, I tell you it *shall* go on. That is, I shall take no interference."

"I shall find means," said Hanbury, looking up, "never fear! Too many hearts are interested in this young creature, to let her be lost without an effort."

"Ah!" said Romaine, "*now* we have it all. The good, faithful, well-meaning friend has let it out! Well, go back to

your employer, Mr. Hanbury, and tell her from me that it will not do. It has failed, and *will* fail. Her own persuasion was of no use, and intimidation will turn out equally profitable. There!" and he rang the bell. "I am quite serious in this! Look you, I shall be interfered with by no woman, and certainly by *no man*. Mind! And as you are a friend of the family, perhaps you will hint to them that if *this* becomes a matter of serious interference with my affairs, it may turn out rather a dangerous game for *them*! I know a good deal about most families, and what most families would not wish to be known! Just hint that to your friend, and, if you can recollect them, in those words. There!"

"Then," said John Hanbury, slowly, "you have quite decided?"

"Quite, my dear friend," he said, smiling; "you, at last, understand me, I see."

"What could that heavy creature mean?" thought Mr. Romaine. "He had a mulish look as he went away. I think he hinted that he would try and give me trouble. Dumpkoff, as the Germans say: a regular dumpkoff. Confound him!" he said suddenly, "if he attempts any of his high moral interference with *me*, or, in his clumsy way, tries to give me any annoyance, I shall just mash his big figure into a pulp. Clumsy clown! I wonder I listened to his prosy rubbish so long!"

This scene was at the door. Up-stairs the little lady was keeping a lonely watch in her drawing room. Since her marriage, her grim father had felt that he was not the same company for her that he was of old. Perhaps he did not like to chill her new existence—which had now, he supposed, been bound up with youth and pleasure—with the frost of age.

In all concerning her he had a sensitive delicacy. She took it that he had devoted himself so long to her interests as a sort of sacrifice, and now that she had found a more suitable companion, was glad to be restored to his books. She was sitting there alone, neither reading, nor writing, nor working, but simply thinking. Now in a hopeless dejection; now lashing her little soul into fury, with dwelling on what she thought her wrongs. She was determined to die sooner than "give in." Her dress—the dress of Laura, which she was to play to Mr. Romaine's Petrarch—had come home not an hour ago, and lay upon a sofa near her. Madame Gay, who had come in person to see the effect, and to lay on "a touch" here and there, was in French ecstasies at the result. It was magnificent,

divine, "ravishing." Madame took away the light of her eyes! "And monsieur—Monsieur Romaine"—added Madame Gay, with a "fin" air, and a recollection of her Paris training—"how *he* will be pleased!"

Mrs. Fermor coloured. She was not skilful at the right reply or at the right manner. "He has brought this humiliation on me!" she thought, meaning Fermor "*He* exposes me to the remarks of such people as these."

Madame Gay saw the blush, and, still following her Paris instincts, took it for a blush of pleasure.

"Ah," she went on, "such a gay, gallant gentleman, and he admires madame so! Il souffre. I know it well. Mon Dieu! comme il souffre!"

Mrs. Fermor turned on her with flashing eyes.

"What do you mean!" she said. "You forget yourself. I do not want to hear such things. How dare you?" and she stamped her foot angrily.

Madame Gay was contrite and deeply penitent. "Elle me boudait," she said afterwards, telling the story to a lady of her own country. "Ciel! comme elle me boudait. But all the time, elle s'y prenait bien, voyez vous. She is a charming little coquaine."

Presently the Frenchwoman, accepting this indignation as an invitation, came back to the subject.

"If I dared," she said, "if Madame would not be angry, I would tell her a little secret about this very dress. I will tell it in a little whisper. It is all paid for! M. Fairmore——"

With doubt, and eagerness, and pleasure in her eyes, Mrs. Fermor turned round hastily. "Yes," she said; "go on Tell me quick!"

Under the rich material of Laura's dress a little reproach was working.

"M. Fairmore is not to know a word," went on Madame Gay, with mystery. "It is a cadeau, a surprise from a true chevalier."

"Take it off, take it off!" said Mrs. Fermor, hurriedly; "quick, quick! Don't lose a moment;" and to the astonishment of the Paris lady, she began tearing at the rich laces and ribbons of Laura's dress.

"Madame will destroy it all," said Madame Gay, distractedly, catching her arms. "Take care, for the love of God! There, that is better."

"Go away," said Mrs. Fermor, distractedly; "leave this

house. Never come here again. Don't pay me any of your horrible compliments."

"Madame is ill," said the Frenchwoman, calmly. "Here is eau-de-Cologne. I shall come to-morrow evening at the same hour."

When she was gone Mrs. Fermor threw herself back in deep affliction. "He has brought this on me," she said; "my name will be in everybody's mouth. This dreadful woman will go round and tell her fine ladies! I shall be spoken of, pointed at, and I have no one to help or advise me. No, no, not one." Then she started up suddenly. "If the world thinks so—let it think so. It will wring his heart. He will know too late what he has lost. He is sensitive about being pointed at; so am I. When he shall see me admired, with all the world at my feet, with the great and the noble worshipping me, he will, perhaps, regret what he has lost." She walked to her glass. Laura's dress became her wonderfully. The excitement in her eyes and cheeks became her yet more. She walked before her glass. "Ah! It will do," she said.

"Indeed it will do," said a voice at the door; "it is superb and dazzling. Petrarch admires!"

"Go away," said she, in a frightened voice, going to the other room. "Why do you come here at this time? You should not—you know you should not. Go away—quick—I implore of you."

"If you act like that on *the* night," said Mr. Romaine, placing a chair for himself in the middle of the room, "it will be the success of the season."

"You must go," she said more excitedly, "or I shall ring and send for some one."

"Hush!" he said, rising. "I am sure you are too sensible to make a noise, or bring in people from the streets, or do anything of that sort. No, no. Listen to me. I heard that the dress was to be home at this hour, and merely looked in to see the effect. I have seen it, and am going. There."

"Ah! the dress. Yes," said Mrs. Fermor, more excitedly still. "I shall never put it on again," repeated Mrs. Fermor, passionately. "Never!"

"That would be foolish," said he, calmly, "at now three-quarters past the eleventh hour. I had no idea the effect would be so good. Let us be rational. You are displeased, and I believe you are right. I am hasty sometimes. I shall go and get my money back from that French creature, and you shall pay her."

This was reasonable, and Mrs. Fermor had no answer ready. He went on. "A charming dress—(I am really going now). And all my design, recollect. Why, that wandering husband of yours, when he sees you in it, will go down on his knees like a prodigal. I know these Orsons well. He will be your slave for the rest of his life. I have known many cases. Do you see my plan? Isn't it wonderful in a wild ogre like me."

Mrs. Fermor sighed and shook her head. "I don't know whether to believe you or not. I can trust no one now. He is too fond of the world," she said, "and I am too prosy for him."

"You talk of his indifference," he said, and went walking up and down. "I don't believe in it. He is acting a part; I know it. He is burning to love you, but his cursed pride is in the way. Else he must be the stupidest, vilest, most insensible block that ever came into this world. Else he has dull eyes. Else he is a mere savage and brute beast. Else he is so wrapped up in his own vanity and selfishness—his own utter heartlessness——"

"Mr. Romaine!" said she.

"No, my dear Mrs. Fermor," said he, in another voice, "trust me, a man of the world. You will see a marvellous change after *the* night. Is it not good of me! I am like the man on the branch sawing it away stupidly. Under the new régime, I shall, of course, be turned out, never admitted again. That I expect. It is always the case with me. I believe I must be going to die, I am getting so good. All my friends are cutting me. Good night."

He went away at once—went away singing and beating the rails down the street with his stick. "Poor little soul!" he said; "how she lets the net wrap round and round her again!"

CHAPTER THE SIXTY-NINTH.

A REMONSTRANCE.

WE are now hurrying on to a crisis. It was better, indeed, that it should come to a crisis; for the demoralisation in the Fermor household was growing day by day. With such cold defiance, such quick temper, on both sides, it was not improbable

that, to gain an advantage in the struggle, and secure a humiliation for an antagonist, one or other might forget decency, and make a confidant of that cruel gossip, the Public.

One night, Fermor, just going out, was summoned down to see a gentleman "in the hall." He came down impatiently, with the words, "I am busy. I really have no time now," on his lips. It was Hanbury. "Well," said he, coldly to him. "What is it *now*?"

"Can I speak to you?" said the other, earnestly; "five minutes is all I want. It is about yourself, too."

The servant was standing by, and hindered Fermor's ready and angry answer. He turned on him.

"Go down, sir," he said. "What are you waiting there for?"

"Come in here a moment," said Hanbury; "I will not detain you. It is something that you should know."

"Now," said Fermor, as he closed the door, "I thought, on the last occasion, I had made myself understood. If this is on the same topic——"

"It is on the same topic," said Hanbury, firmly. "It is not for me to mind how you take it. To-day I have heard something which it is right you should know. Something which it would be a crime to conceal!"

This word stopped something in the nature of a protest against "interference."

"Ah, Fermor, get rid of this wretched sensitiveness, this terrible pride, which is destroying you. What infatuation is this that prevents you from listening to those who mean well, and would do you no harm? I *must* speak plainly to you; especially as I must tell you that the world is speaking plainly of you, and is busy with your name and affairs. Oh, Fermor, *do* listen to me now, without any of this absurd feeling. It is a friend who speaks to you."

This tone actually took Fermor's breath away. He had no reply to make.

"It is about Romaine and—Mrs. Fermor," he said. "It should be looked to at once. I will tell you what occurred to-day. I was at our club, looking over a paper (though I don't care much for news), and there was a lot of young fellows about an old red-faced officer who was telling them stories. I heard the name of Romaine, and could not help listening. The old man was telling them some of his horrible old stories, and lamenting what he called the 'decay of fellows' at this day, and said that Romaine was the only man that had a spark of

‘pluck.’ And then one of the young fellows, whom I knew a little—and think of this, Fermor, in a public room!—laughed, and said that he knew what he was after, and that soon—You can guess, Fermor. And the old man laughed and enjoyed it. Oh, Fermor, you would *not* take my advice! I warned you in time!”

The feeling in Fermor’s heart was still not mortification, but anger, bitter anger, at a mere “untrained fool” like Hanbury, setting up to be wise and worldly. “You always come charged with good news,” he said. “And how kind of my friends to allow my concerns to be spoken of in a public place that way. I suppose *that* was friendly, eh?”

He had *now* caught Hanbury.

“Exactly. I knew the man,” said Hanbury, calmly, “and went up to him, and asked him, before the others, had he authority for what he said, or did he merely repeat what he heard? He said it was merely a vulgar Town story that ‘some fellow’ had told. I said that I knew both Romaine and you and the lady, that the whole was perfectly false from beginning to end, and that I knew it, and had opportunities of knowing. That Mr. Romaine was a friend—alone in the world with few friends—and that it was cruel and wicked to put such a construction on what was only good nature and kindness.” (John Hanbury did not tell all he had really said or done, or how calmly and temperately he had brought the “young fellow” to account before the rest—how he had quietly asked him, was he sure about his information, and did he think it right to bring a mere vulgar rumour like that to the public room), and injure an innocent young girl in that way? “For my part,” said John Hanbury, “I know *all* the parties, and see them almost every day, and I say the whole thing is false—false in every particular; and I am sure after this you will not repeat it any more.” The “young fellow,” who had not yet lost the virgin bloom of youth, nor had learnt to consider Reputations to be mere low delf figures, with which he could play at “knocks” and “smash” at so many shots for a penny, became a little ashamed, and said he was sure it was a mistake. But the old colonel looked on with disgust, and repeated, that though he knew nothing of the parties, he was “cursed” sure it was no mistake, and that every one of “the lot”—meaning ladies—were “skittish,” and “up to *that* game,” if you only “knew how to take them, dammy!”)

But Fermor, as he listened, grew furious. “And do you mean to tell me you did this—made me and her the talk of a coffee-

room? It will be all over the town! I tell you, I don't want this championship, or patronage either."

"Patronage!" said John Hanbury.

"I don't, I tell you!" the other went on, with increasing excitement. "I suppose it is well-meaning, and all that sort of thing. But I don't want it. I wish to God you would leave me and my concerns alone. I don't want any man to be defending my wife in coffee-rooms."

"But can you wonder at other people," said Hanbury, quietly, "when you do not seem to care to do it yourself? Surely, when you, who should naturally protect and watch over her——"

"Sir! Well, that is my concern," said Fermor, "*quite* my concern. Upon my word, it is coming to a pretty pass——But I must now request——"

"I am astonished," said Hanbury, "I am shocked. I could not believe it of you. Such utter and miserable infatuation. It is charitable to suppose you do not see the danger. Ah! what do you suppose is *my* concern in this matter? Do you fancy if it were any one else I should expose myself to what might be said? I may not tell you all. But there is one to whose name I am bound for life, in whom all that I can do or live for is centred. *You know who that is as well as I.* She has appointed me to this task. Her heart is set on it. And through me she tells you, fly, fly from this place, from this country, and take that poor girl with you. It is the only chance!"

During this speech, wonder, almost stupefaction, and rage, succeeded each other in Fermor. Wonder at the superior tone and weight Hanbury was assuming; stupefaction at the message he brought; and, finally, rage at the confidence and undertaking it implied.

"I am very glad you tell me this," he said, with trembling lips. "That shows me how I can trust the rest of your advice. Miss Manuel think of such a thing!—send *me* such a message, and by *you*!" He laughed aloud at the notion. "My good Hanbury, don't come advising me again. *Fly indeed!* You don't know the world, I can see very clearly."

"I tell you it is so, on my word of honour," said the other, eagerly. "She loves Mrs. Fermor. She would help and save her. Listen to me, listen to *her*, Fermor. Only yesterday she conjured me to persuade you. She would give the world that you would go away, and take her advice. Do! I implore of you, Fermor."

"How much you know," said Fermor, struggling with the

sense of superiority. "Poor Hanbury! Women can easily persuade you. Ah, my good friend, in time you will come to learn that there is more meaning behind what women say than what *you* would fancy. Often the very contrary to what they say. Well, Hanbury, you are not *quite* in her councils, *I* can tell you." (The opportunity was overpowering, and could not be resisted. He went on :) "I only say this much: she has her reasons, of course, for speaking to you; but, *I can tell you, I am about the last person in Town she would wish to leave it.*"

The triumph in his eye was so intelligible, the flush of vanity to his face so marked, and the miserable egotism of the man so naked, that the whole truth came upon Hanbury like an inspiration. He started back, as though some one had suddenly whispered in his ear.

"Oh, Fermor!" he exclaimed, almost with contempt, "to see you so infatuated!"

Fermor coloured.

"Blind, indeed!" Hanbury went on. "I was not prepared for *this*. I now see it is hopeless. It explains all. But be a man! Get rid of these delusions! It is almost laughable. She who so lived for and loved that sister! Why, if there was one whom she should dislike and punish, and whom, indeed, I *know* she——But forgive me. I am speaking for your good, you know."

Fermor's fury and mortification combined were now at their height. "You come to insult me," he said. "I don't want you. Don't interfere in my concerns again; I shall take it up seriously, if you do. It is going too far. Never interfere with me again. I warn you."

"Very well," said Hanbury, sadly; "you must take your course. I *now* see it all. It is the old infatuation, and you are scarcely accountable. You shall not offend me, Fermor, and I shall help you yet, in spite of yourself."

Fermor was left in a state scarcely to be described. It was the insufferable air of patronage and of superior information and wisdom that galled him more than anything in the world, and, above all, that sort of privity with Miss Manuel. For the first time, too, an uneasy suspicion flashed upon him as to there being some truth in what that "stupid, lumbering, blundering fellow" had hinted.

From this moment a bitter, fretful desire entered into Fermor to meet with Romaine and quarrel with him. This was indeed but a disguise for that wish to punish some one for the mortifi-

cations that were being heaped on him. Fighting was exploded, and not to be dreamed of; and he knew very well that the cool Romaine would not suffer it to come to that. So he racked his brains to discover some way by which he could effectually outrage and insult him. In this mood, he unluckily came face to face with Mrs. Fermor. Here was the opportunity. She was the Christian thrown to the lions. *She* was not a cold, skilled hand that could retort upon him or repulse him. At the sight of her, the lecture he had suffered, the mortifications, the suspicions about Miss Manuel, all came rushing on him. Here was a fit whipping-post ready to his hand.

She was in a gentle humour. The sense of her loneliness, and the feeling of desertion, was growing upon her. Perhaps, after all, she had been thinking, she had not been making allowance. Perhaps, with a little advance——But Fermor burst on her: "It seems we are now the talk of clubs and coffee-rooms, and strange gentlemen take up the cudgels for you good naturedly, and say you mean no harm. Cheerful news, eh? However, *that* is no matter, as it will all soon end—*must* end."

This made her as defiant as he was; as wounded, as rebellious, perhaps as vindictive. "As soon as you please," she said; "perhaps sooner. Do you wish the servants to hear as well as the gentlemen in the clubs?"

"This tone won't do," said Fermor, with a trembling voice. "I've had too much of it. Most luckily, it is not too late."

During this speech Mrs. Fermor had thought of a famous retort. She would not have repressed it for the world. "I am glad," she said, her little heart beating fast, "that there *are* gentlemen who take up my cause, and have remarked the treatment I am subject to. I am *very* glad."

"Gentlemen or no gentlemen," said he, with a heart beating as fast, "these goings on must be stopped, and stopped promptly. As a beginning, I require peremptorily that you do not exhibit yourself at this foolish show of Lady Laura's. In fact, I shall take good care that you do not go."

"And what if I *do* go?" said Mrs. Fermor, with sparkling eyes.

"We shall see," said Fermor, scornfully.

"And we *shall* see," repeated Mrs. Fermor, as scornfully.

Yet only a few minutes before, during that interval of softness, she was thinking whether, after all, it would not be better to go to him and make this little sacrifice, as a sort of opening

to reconciliation. But now that was all over for ever and ever. If she was to *die*, she would go.

Poor Mrs. Fermor! All helpless, and cast entirely among "gentlemen friends," she had no one to rely upon or look to for aid or counsel. Men, after all, with their free manners, were *true* beings. Not so faithless, she thought, as women. A hot spirit was working in her veins, a strange excitement, and pride was carrying her forward in this path. She had no time to think. Everything seemed to conspire cruelly to hurry her into that crooked course. Thus she gave directions that Mr. Romaine was not to be let in; for she had begun to shrink from the calm, collected air of direction and authority which he had latterly begun to assume. When he sauntered up the stairs, in defiance of these orders, her face flushed, and she drew back. "I am not at home," she said, excitedly. "I don't want to see people. I said that you were not to come in. You must go."

"A girl feebly tried to stop me," he said, "but I saw the lie on her lips. Surely I know that you are always at home at this hour. What is the use of this little artifice with *me*?"

"It is very wrong," she went on, passionately, for she felt her own helplessness. "And rude. You think you can do as you please here. I won't permit it," she added, with a little stamp; "you come here too often, and I have told you so."

"Perhaps so!" he said, looking at her with genuine astonishment, as it seemed to her. "I am sure I do. I must try and mend, though. You tell us these harsh truths a little roughly. You should break the fall, and prepare us! Last day you were kinder. Well! it is only one more like all the rest!" And, taking his hat again, added, "Good-bye."

There was such a wounded hurt air in his manner, that her heart smote her a little.

"I always say more than I mean," she said. "I have no choice of words. *You* understand me, I know. I am worried and miserable. No one stands by me, or, I believe, cares for me now."

"A discovery!" he said, bitterly. "But that is the old song from the beginning of the world. Who cares for me, I should like to know? Who has ever cared? I have given up looking for *that* sort of article. Only I *did* suppose," he went on, excitedly, like one of the great dolts which all men are, "that *you* had a sort of toleration for me—a good nature, a sympathy for the poor rough creature who has had his troubles, and whom you encouraged, I say, for some purpose of your own, into a

dream that there was something like heart left on the earth. For a moment I believed in you, Mrs. Fermor! I supposed that you would not descend to the tricks and deceits of other women."

"Tricks and deceits?" she repeated. "Oh no."

"Using me," he went on, more excitedly still, "for the virtuous end of stirring up the slumbering fires of *his* affection. I see. Oh, of course," he said, "I am taking a liberty in making these speeches. But it is the truth."

"You do me injustice, indeed you do," she said. "I never dreamed of such a thing."

She felt, in penitential confusion, that she had behaved harshly—coarsely even. She would have done anything for an opportunity to show how sorry she was. "Sit down," she said, "won't you? If you go away at once, I shall know that you are offended."

"Offended?" he said. "No. It is more in sorrow than in anger—as men go away in the novels. And yet I don't know what to make of you," he said, sitting down. "I *ought* to go. And with it all I *don't* hate you, as I *ought* to."

She laughed and tossed her head, as any other woman, the most prudish, might have done in the same case.

"I have no sense," he said, impatiently. "I have an odd stupid notion, or have dreamt it, that you are a *little* like myself: that you find that no one understands you, no one cares for you: that you are alone on an iceberg. It is a mere fancy, but it is in my head. No matter whether it be true or not." Mrs. Fermor sighed. "Well, I came to-night, merely because I heard that you were going—going at once. My sin was coming to say good-bye."

"I—we—never thought of going," said Mrs. Fermor, wondering. "Who told you?"

"Well; one who is supposed to be a very great friend of yours and of mine—Miss Manuel. She was very eager about it, and wished me to persuade you to go. Why, I wonder?"

"Why?" said Mrs. Fermor, suddenly flashing out. "Ah! *you* can't guess; but there is a reason for all these things."

"It is a good reason, I suppose?" he said.

"Is it?" said she. "Ah, you who know the world so well have much to learn; and so have I. Oh," she said, almost crying, "I don't know where to turn to. Every hour brings out some new treachery."

"Exactly," said he quietly. "We are wonderfully like, I see."

Just what I find. But, dear Mrs. Fermor, it grieves me to see you in this way; you who are so young, and fresh, and fair, and who ought to be very happy. I can't be acting shams; I don't care to take the trouble. I tell you plainly I have seen that there is trouble on your mind which I may help. Forgive me, if I say what I should not say, and give me but a hint, and I stop. But where I have a deep, earnest, and sincere interest in one who so brusquely turns me into the street——"

"I do indeed believe you to be a friend," said she, piteously. "And I should be ungracious if I did not understand your good will; but——"

"Now," said Romaine, drawing his chair closer, "I see most things, and where I don't see, I have an instinct. There is Fermor, your husband——May I go on?"

She looked at him irresolutely, and tried to call up her faithless pride, which was hurrying away to the rear. "I think on this subject——"

"Exactly," he said, pushing his chair away again. "I knew it. Poor Romaine! he is always going through the ice."

"Oh, go on," she said, a little fretfully; "tell me what you mean."

"Well," he said, gravely, "Fermor, our friend, your husband—a good deal of allowance is to be made for him. He was a beau garçon once. His head was turned. (Don't be angry.) He has been humoured—perhaps spoiled. This I mean in his relation to the common world outside, walking the streets. Well, he treats that world with some airs, and how is that world curing him? How do you suppose? By leaving him altogether to himself. The treatment has already had a wholesome effect. It will do him good; it will soften him in time. You see, the world is the best mistress *in* the world. You could not, my dear Mrs. Fermor, go to a better school."

She looked at him wondering, yet comprehending perfectly.

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Fermor," he went on, eagerly, "we are all too much humoured—we men, I mean. You, I fear, are an angel of sweetness"—she started—"you women, I mean. It does us no good. The more we get, the more we want. We are not a bit obliged for the homage. There is some vile, overbearing dross in us. Keep us at the grinding-stone, and we love you all the same. The sweet suffering wife is only a drudge, and *made* a drudge."

She looked at him still with dilated eyes, but his words brought conviction. Long after he had gone, she sat pondering on them.

At last she said aloud, "How rude and brutal I was to him, and how gently he bore my pettishness. I begin to think he *is* my only friend in this world. And all he says is so sensible."

Never was she so confirmed in her resolution of "dying first" before giving up going to Lady Laura's.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTIETH.

A BRAVE STRUGGLE.

LADY LAURA'S festival was now fast hurrying on. Once she had determined on it, she went to the task with truly Spartan energy. And, indeed, there was much to encourage her. Though her worn and jaded limbs tottered as she struggled up the steep and stony mountains, still she flourished up on her poor old shoulder a banner with the device of *Excelsior*. She seemed to force on events by her indomitable will. And it had actually come to pass just a few nights before at old Lady Tozer's, that young Spendlesham, arriving about one A.M., very pink and dewy about his face, and very rich and thick about his speech, and full of kindness and good will to all men and women in his sentiments, had fallen into the meshes of a Calypso, who had been looking out for him for hours, and had been led away to her island—a greenhouse upon the stairs—where he long sat in a wine-y rapture. Sometimes Calypso made as though she would seek Calypso's mamma, but was checked by Ulysses, who, in his deep rich voice, said, "Don't go yet;" with deep and burning reproach. On which the gentle Calypso began to pry curiously into the joinings of her fan, and asked with gentle suffering where had *he* been all the night? On which Ulysses began to protest hotly, "Noin-deed! But *you*—you want to go—"

Later, an hour later, Calypso whispered softly to her mamma, and the worn lines of mamma's face were lit with a flush of hope. She had laboured through the heats, and had quarried iron rocks, and had found what had repaid her. She hurried at once to secure the young lord. She took him captive, wisely and warily, on the spot. "I am so glad," she whispered to him. "This is a happy moment for me. The happiest moment of my life." Had she been at all familiar with Holy Writ, she

would have quoted *Nunc dimittis*. And then she led him to this person and to that, and exhibited her prize. "Lady Tozer," she said, "you know Lord Spendlesham; Blanche and he have been settling something together. Most 'suitable in every respect," she whispered. My lord, still dewy—about as rich and thick in his voice as curaçoa—and swinging back and forward to the banister, as if preparing for a spring, said something about a "sharmigirl." Lady Laura kept to him fast, and went through the rooms, dragging him at her car, so that presently everybody, including some safe business-like friends, became acquainted with the joyful news that young Spendlesham had proposed for that second Fermor girl. For this official publicity was safety.

Thus inspired, Lady Laura toiled up the heights with renewed energy. Was she at all mortal, or did she find sleep or support from such things as breakfasts and dinners, from meats or wines? Night and day it was all one; she worked and toiled with head, heart, and hands. She should have been a general in the field. She found everything; she thought of everything; for Blanche and her sister were poor helpless creatures. Yet at this time the tradesmen and tradeswomen were coming thick and fast to the door; were pressing and loud voiced; and, once in the hall, refused to depart without audience. The job-master was heard below, turbulent and insolent. Lady Laura, above in her bedroom—where a "cheap Dorcas woman" was at work under superintendence, and where her own worn fingers laboured at tulle and silk—came down courageously and calmly to meet these rude Troopers. The job-master she worsted easily; with him she took the high tone. She whipped him across the face with "My daughter's marriage with Lord Spendlesham." "His lordship," she said, "will be mounting his establishment when he returns from his wedding tour, and I should like to have mentioned your name to him. He will want hunters and carriage-horses, and all sorts of things. But now you have been so troublesome to me, that really," said Lady Laura, smiling, "I don't see how I can reasonably mention you to him." The job-master was repentant in a moment. "You see 'ow it is, my lady," he said; "we as keeps 'orses find it very 'ard to make the thing go." And then he said it was of no consequence, and retired.

With Madame Adelaide her encounter was of a different nature. That shrill and feline milliner had taken off her gloves, which every Frenchwoman wears to hide claws, and had long

since been "spitting" and screaming at her debtor. She had dared to send an "Attorney's letter" to Lady Laura. Lady Laura drove to her boldly in the job-master's carriage, and courageously strode in to her den. "Where is madame?" she said to the neat Phyllisses who were scattered among the bonnets and "dummies." "Send her here, please."

Madame came, with the feline tusks displayed, and the whiskers almost visible. "I have received *this*," said Lady Laura, showing the letter. "I shall take no notice of it whatever. You have injured yourself more than you fancy. My daughter shall not get so much as a bonnet for her trousseau from you."

"I do not care," said the milliner, "but you shall pay me all de same."

"At my convenience," said Lady Laura. "I have it here," she said, showing some notes, "but you shall wait. I shall take care that my daughter, who is to marry Lord Spendlesham, shall not deal with you. I have shown Lady John Villiers *this*, and she says it is outrageous. If I was to tell this generally, I could ruin you."

Lady Laura drove away—in the job-master's carriage—again victorious. The milliner made a degrading submission. She found money, too, did Lady Laura, just as skilful spendthrifts find money, and perhaps in the same way. She may have been to a dirty snuffy Jew in a dirty snuffy back parlour, and have raised it on a bill, as well as the clever spendthrift. She may have taken her grandmother's heavy silver teapot and sugar bowl under her cloak, and gone down a remote street in the City, to a silversmith where such things were bought, and where she would have made a good bargain and got more money than another man or woman. There were old diamond earrings, too, which her father had given her when she was a girl, centuries ago, when there were such things for her in the world as affections, and sympathy, and associations, and hearts, before the frosts of fashion had set in and killed every plant and flower. When she took these trophies out of their worn velvet-lined case, something like a faint breath of warmth and softness seemed to come out with them. She handled them with reverence. These, it was well remembered, disappeared about this time.

Workmen were in the house, busy in the drawing-rooms, constructing a stage, under Mr. Romaine's superintendence. Fine scenery was being painted, musicians were secured to play

suitable music, and the light green vans of Duval, the well-known monopolist pastrycook, had been seen occasionally at the door. These splendid auxiliaries happily required no ready money. The coming alliance, belled about in the fashionable papers, was accepted as a note of hand, and readily discounted. Madame Adelaide, deeply repentant, was permitted, at her own urgent entreaty, to prepare a gorgeous fancy dress of richest texture and materials, to set off Blanche's charms. The house was in possession of visitors and strangers all day long. It was upside down, topsy-turvy, on its side. There was no breakfast, no dinner, in regular fashion. Nor did the relations with the servants—at all times peculiarly delicate—permit of any despotic manners. It was understood, however, that they too were to share in the general largess that was approaching, and during the interval suspended all hostile action. Wonderful old Spartan! she controlled everything, and found everything, and thought of everything, and brought everything gradually into shape. There are many such wives, widows, and martyrs, labouring about us, who do more in their own way than the most slaving lawyer who ever struggled to earn his bread, or to become Attorney-General and Chancellor.

Another struggle had ended very happily also. The eve of Major Carter's marriage had now arrived. A few stray questions had come, like "dropping shots," from a few inquisitive persons. That awkward and ugly challenge, "Who is he?" was of course varied; some putting it in this form: "Who the deuce is he?" "Who the d—l is this Carter?" But the replies were satisfactory always; and, better than all, Carter was seen quartered with Sir John Westende, that baronet leaning on his arm. A respectable and even brilliant company had been asked, and really secured by the major's exertions, to do honour to his nuptials.

The universal feeling about Mrs. Wrigley was, that she was making "an old fool of herself;" but that about the major was as though he had performed a clever feat, like one who had made a successful adventure in cotton or indigos, or had happily run a blockade. "Of course he'll choke off the poor old soul after a time," said Colonel Foley, in a spirit of rude jest, and leaning both hands on his stick, as if it were a spade. "Carter is a little impatient, *deu-side-ly* impatient, I can tell you, and will not wait long for any man—or woman either."

The major was coming home that afternoon, looking down on the flags with a complacent smile of pleasure—for he had happily made sure of a young lord out of a cavalry regiment, who

would be as good as a pine-apple for the feast—when he happened to pass near the top of the street, where the Irrefragable had its office. He thought that as he was now going away on this delightful wedding—beginning a new life, as it were—he might as well give them a last injunction. He walked in and put his usual question, gaily adding, that he supposed he would be paid some day—say about the time of the final redemption of the National Debt—come now? Mr. Speedy had not yet returned, but would most likely be home the day after to-morrow. “And *then*,” added Mr. Speedy’s locum tenens, “you shall hear from us.”

“You must direct, then” said the major, still gaily, “to the Great Hotel in Paris, or to the Isles Britanniques at Rome; and I declare I had rather you would not, for I don’t want to be worried with business *now*. You don’t know, perhaps, that I am going to be married to-morrow morning? We go across to Calais to-morrow night.”

“You *do*?” said the locum tenens, astonished. And there was a general up-turning of faces in the office.

When Major Carter left it, his reflection was the old reflection—how ready the world is to do homage to what is flourishing in the world. The manner of these fellows “is” quite changed to me,” he said, “now that they see I am bettering myself.”

In the office, the locum tenens said hastily to *his* deputy, “We must have Speedy back at once!” And in a few seconds the messenger was hurrying to the telegraphic-office with a written scrap of paper.

Still smiling, and still moralising on this “cringing” character of the world, the major walked on towards the fashionable quarter. He was painting in for himself this breakfast on the next morning, with the fashionable faces he had secured to grace it. He was reading, in anticipation, the fashionable journal of the day after, and its select list. He grew soft and tender over himself, as he thought of the battle of life he had fought, and fought so successfully. “I had only myself to help me,” he said, looking back. “I had to fight my own way, and I think I have done very fairly. Always been with the best, and have done them no discredit. This is not so bad a finish.” He was still smiling to the flags as he walked, when a carriage, which had passed him, stopped suddenly, and a lady called to him. The major’s fingers went to his hat by a sort of instinct.

Miss Manuel had been driving here and there, in fact, she knew not whither, still pursued by the eager wish to do something towards stopping the great evil. She suddenly saw Major Carter smiling to the flags (and sometimes tapping them playfully with his stick), when the thought flashed upon her, "This poor wretch! I have been labouring to do him mischief. At this moment judgment may be gathering over his head. He is unworthy of serious punishment for what he has done to *us*—at least others may hunt him down if they will—and a word to him will be no harm."

The major's smile passed away as he saw who it was. So, *she* was also of that world who came cringing to him as his prospects brightened! But the game *she* had played with him was too serious, to be condoned so readily.

"Major Carter," she said, "I have just stopped to tell you something. I know all sorts of people, and hear all sorts of things. I am told that you are about being married. Let me advise you—look carefully to yourself. There are dangers that perhaps you have not thought of. Do not think of marriages, or such things. I confess I am no friend of yours, but still I give you this friendly warning."

For a second a shade of anxiety and alarm came into his face. Then it was all clear, and he laughed.

"I know that you are no friend of mine, Miss Manuel," he said. "But I can't be angry with you. You are very clever. I really admire you. But I am not angry with you. We have had our little game out, and it is not for me to say who has been the winner. But you are welcome to the title, with all my heart. I am in good humour with all the world to-night. So, thanks, a thousand thanks, for your very melodramatic warning."

He was indeed in good humour that evening. As he walked away, he was greatly amused. "What a clever creature," he thought, "and how well she did it! For the moment she almost took me in. Another man would have been frightened, and perhaps listened to her. Her last move has failed. I should not be surprised if she went mad one of these days."

CHAPTER THE SEVENTY-FIRST.

MAJOR CARTER'S WEDDING-DAY.

THE following morning—the day of the Carter wedding—was a bright one, with plenty of sun. There was great flash and bustle in the little square where Major Carter lived. Nearly every one round knew of the solemnity. Many were at the windows, and a few on the steps. A series of expresses seemed to be flying backwards and forwards between the major's house and other quarters. He himself, bright and shining as a new suit and the very closest shaving and polishing could make him, was seen in glimpses and flashes, as it were, now flinging himself into a cab and disappearing, now dashing out of a cab on to the steps, into the house, as though he had come with a reprieve for a criminal,

So with Mrs. Wrigley, the widow, on whose figure workwomen and maids had been at work from an early hour. She was in a sort of fat flutter and trepidation. As she said often, "the moment of her destiny was drawing on." They had invested her with the richest, stiffest, white satin, which was as inflexible as milled board, and dressed her in it, as though she were an idol. Her neighbours knew of it, and were out on *their* steps; and a great carriage—not the chariot, which was wanted for another purpose—waiting at the door, with a huge display of favours and ribbons, proclaimed through the street the general notion of Marriage. •

She was presently at the church, where there was a block of carriages already, belonging to the gay company that Major Carter had so carefully recruited. It was a fine fashionable temple, where the thing was done in a highly fashionable way, and by a highly fashionable incumbent. Where the cushions showed the impressions of select elbows and select knees; and where the letters of the Commandments seemed to run indistinctly into the characters of the Court Guide. In such a temple the rite received extra solemnity; and the fashionable incumbent was "assisted" by the Rev. Alfred Hoblush. Thus, standing at the rails, in this atmosphere of Belgravian sanctity, with the crowd of ladies and gentlemen of good degree looking on, Major Carter was united to his bride. The fashionable incumbent almost chanted the words of the rite, bleating them, as it were, plaintively; and to his song the work was accomplished.

It was a happy moment for the major. Bride and bridegroom came out together on the top of the little steps in the sort of little slum at the back of the fashionable temple. But many select rites had glorified the slum. Their carriage was there, and the crowd, who lived in the back lane, and whose life was to see marriages driving away in inexhaustible variety. The major and his bride, enshrined in this carriage as in a casket, drove away in a tumult of happiness.

At Mrs. Wrigley's mansion was the breakfast, and the company. Such a company! It did honour to the major's recruiting powers. It had cost him infinite pains and trouble. To some he had to give "bounties;" others, who might be called "bringers," he had to supply with "head-money;" but still there were the ranks full, and a goodly show. There was a nice leavening of aristocracy—Lord Puttenham, and the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Brownbill, being present; there were some "nice girls," in that gay and glittering plumage which is only seen at weddings and flower-shows; there were officers for the nice girls, men whom Major Carter took pleasantly by the arm or shoulder; there was "Old Foley," tightened almost to gasping; Young Brett; Lady Laura Fermor and her daughters, who had been persuaded to come with some pains. Young Spendlesham had agreed to come too, but, at the last moment, had sent a note with an excuse about important business. Many and many times did Lady Laura's eyes wander wistfully to the door.

The feast was sumptuous indeed. The arch-pastrycook had looked to it. Everything rich, or delicate, or costly, was spread out. The bride and bridegroom sat side by side. The fountains of champagne were flowing briskly, and faces framed in white bonnets began to acquire the heated flush which always attends on this morning feasting. It is a proud hour for Major Carter. He thinks again, as he looks down the table, and reciprocates the fat smile of his bride, how he has fought his way, single-handed, through life, without aid from any one, and is now ending so respectably.

Now we must have some speaking. It is rather a nuisance—perhaps a little old fashioned; but where Lord Puttenham has kindly expressed a wish to air his rhetoric, such considerations must be waived. He does it very neatly, and drily—in chips, as it were. A little attempt at humour, which, we may be sure, is not allowed to miscarry. It was an "auspicious" day, he said. His friend Carter, he was sure, had made a judicious

choice. He was sure to make the lady he had selected happy, though his friend Carter, he must say, had one fault—he was one of the most unmusical men he had ever met with. (This allusion produced extraordinary merriment.) Yes, his friend Carter, he would do him that justice, did not know a crotchet from a quaver, though he sincerely hoped that in their married life there would be an absence of crotchets of a particular sort. (Roars and applause.) Perhaps that was the reason that he himself (Lord Puttenham) had never married—he was too musical. (Amusement.) The man who had not music in his soul, or would not appreciate a posthumous quartet of the immortal Beethoven's, he would say was fit for treason and stratagem, and all that sort of thing. Though he was quite sure that his friend Carter would not indulge in any stratagems as regards Mrs. Carter—(Great amusement)—whose health he would now propose, &c.

It was a happy moment, one to look back to, when Major Carter rose, with half a glass of champagne in his hand. His white crisp face was a little flushed with other half glasses. He was inclined to say, "God bless you all," many times over. At least, he thought he was affected. The image present to his mind was that of labouring through a hard life, and having now finally come into a port of ease and quiet. This he expressed, Mrs. Carter looking up at him with the soft gelatine eyes. "I have fought my way," said Major Carter, with the half glass of champagne in his hand, "through difficulties. I am not ashamed of it. I have made friends for myself, and I hope and believe they are not ashamed of me. I have had troubles, and I am not sorry to have had them. It has shown me the value of friends—of such friends as I now see sitting round me. We are now going away," continued the major, "I and the lady whom I am proud to call my wife. But we shall return soon, I hope. We shall see—and enjoy, I trust—the pleasant seductions of foreign countries. We may stay a long time or a short time, according as we find it; but believe me," and the major's voice faltered a little, "whether long or short, we shall both look forward to the time when we shall return once more and meet——"

Just at this moment, when Major Carter was raising his champagne-glass again, Major Carter's son, who had not been missed at the feast, entered hastily, and hurried down the room, behind the chairs, to where his father was standing. This was an interruption. Every one looked at him, and saw in the son's face a strange and frightened expression. His father, thus

checked rudely, and yet seeing that he was making for him, stopped, and looked angrily at him. Every one felt that this was a most awkward gauche creature, and that the major was to be rather pitied.

In a second he was at his father's ear, and gave him a short whisper. "*What?*" said Major Carter, laying down his glass quickly. People at the end even seemed to be straining their ears to listen. The son repeated his agonised whisper. The major's head shot round suddenly to a door behind him. When it was seen again, the champagne flush was gone, and there was a twitching and spasm in the region about his lips.

A mixed company is quick at reading signs. "What the deuce is it?" said Lord Puttenham, putting up his eye-glass. "The man is ill, or has heard some bad news." Mrs. Wrigley, heaving in a fright, said anxiously, "Oh, what is it?"

The series of ghastly twitches that shot across the major's face were recollected long afterwards. So, too, was the worn and agonised face of his son. More terrible, too, was it when the major, steadying his face, as it were, by his hand, forced a smile, and brought out a few words.

"A little matter—am sure you will excuse me a moment—shall not be away long."

Again his head turned round to the door behind him—for there were two to the dining-room—and by this one dinners entered. The white bonnets—and the faces flushed with heat inside—began to turn to other white bonnets. Such do not like any "unpleasantness." "Is it an illness?" it was asked: "or what is it?"

Major Carter had gone to that door behind him, opened it, but had shut it hastily, and seemed to put his foot against it. He hurried down the room to the other, that twitch in his face working all the time, and strange falterings coming from him, which seemed to say, "Back in a moment—so sorry—a little business." In a second he had shot through the folding-door at the end.

"Dammy!" said Colonel Foley, who had followed all his motions critically, addressing his neighbour, "it *must* be bailiffs!" The son with the miserable face followed him out.

Outside, in the street, the accustomed crowd were waiting—the carriages for the flushed faces, and the old-fashioned swinging chariot (the coach-box removed), with postilions and posters, to take away "the happy pair." The curious were expectant. It

was known that "she" was an "old woman." Public sympathy was for *him*.

The gentlemen attached to the carriages were talking together in a group, and such of them as had canes leant on them.

Suddenly—about the time it was known that the major was addressing the company—a cab drove up, and two plain, blunt-looking men jumped out, hurried up the steps, but had rung the bell very quietly. As soon as the door was opened, they had stepped in promptly, without telling their business, and one of them, taking hold of the handle, had shut the door to, himself, very quickly. The gentlemen outside with the canes assumed them to be connected with the feast. They asked for the major. The servants of the house were all about the hall, some at the door listening (with the freedom pardonable on such an occasion) to the major's speech.

The hard-working faithful son, who was up-stairs looking to the last preparations for his father's departure, came down to them. One of the hard, plain men, with a sort of tap on his arm, took him aside, and gave him a short whisper, finishing off the whisper with a sharp nod. The son gave a gasp and a half cry, and looked at them with a wild, stupid stare.

"Better *you* tell him," said the plain man, "than we—more decent of the two. Ah! two doors, I see."

And he walked down the passage to the door by which the dinners made their entrance.

On him had looked out for a second the white twitching face of the major. To the other, who waited in the hall, the white twitching face also presently showed itself.

"Now, now," it said, "what is this? At such a time, too! Really, most inconvenient! Now, take care," said he, dropping his voice; "is there *no* mistake?"

"On my word, Major Carter, no," said the blunt man.

"Most inconvenient," said the other, rubbing his white fingers over and over each other. "At such a time, too. Come up-stairs with me to the drawing-room for a moment, will you?"

The two rough men agreed, and they went up; Major Carter, in his bright wedding finery, a little in front. Menial eyes wondered exceedingly. The hall door was now open, and the gentlemen on the steps (with the canes) looked in eagerly. There was quite a perspective of menial faces and canes. The two men and the major shut themselves in the drawing-room, and locked the doors.

A few minutes later, the son, with a miserable and despairing

face, looked into the dining-room, where was the feast in all its magnificence, and the flushed faces, and he whispered to the person nearest, imploringly, "*Do go away, and get them to go away. Oh, something terrible has happened!*"

This was but a whisper, yet somehow every one in the room had an instinct of what was said. There was a sudden rustle of ladies rising, a sound as of chairs pushed back. Even the newly-made Mrs. Carter—in an agitation she had not known for years—hurried to the door. The ladies fell back from her—the female public was outraged at having been seduced into this unpleasantness.

"But what is it?" said the young cavalry lord. "No one seems to know."

"Bailiffs, as I hope to be saved," said Old Foley. "I know the look of the thing. I remember Tommy Jackson, at a dinner he was giving to a few fellows——"

In a few moments, by some mysterious means, the word "Police" had got into the room. No one could tell how, for no one could know. Perhaps they read it in guilty characters on the miserable son's face; perhaps it was in the air, and had forced itself on every one present. Then it was, *saue qui peut*.

"Come, Blanche," said Lady Laura, gathering up her skirts as if she was in the ward of a Fever Hospital. "Let us get away from this dreadful place. Good gracious! Never mind calling up the carriage—they will keep us hours—we can walk to it." She was thinking of young Spendlesham.

At the door, the old chariot and the psters were waiting in stupid immobility. The news had not reached the crowd outside. But there was a perfect rout. The gentlemen with the canes were busy. The carriages were plunging and converging to the door, while the old chariot stood waiting for its tenants, as if they were really to come out together. The crowd, thinking so too, gathered more and more on the steps, and looked eagerly into the hall.

They were never to come out together. Mrs. Wrigley was in her bedroom in fits, with a charitable lady or two trying to help her. One gentleman or two, whose sister or mother or wife had left a shawl or a parasol in the drawing-room, hurried up, and, trying the doors, found them locked.

Inside, some one had had a glimpse of the miserable Carter sitting handcuffed between two officers. They were waiting—charitably—for the house to be cleared.

Finally, it *was* cleared. There were wild stories among the

neighbours, and a small knot kept about the door for the rest of the day. In a short time arrived Mr. Speedy, who went in. Then the drawing-room doors were unlocked, and a cab called. Then the hall door was opened quickly, and a short thin figure, with a white face, shuffled in a great cloak, ran down the steps with a blunt man on each side, and got into the cab. "There he is!" said the little knot. There was no glowing list of fashionable company in the morning papers; but in the evening papers was to be read for a penny an account of the whole. One called it "The Interrupted Wedding," another, the "Esclandre in Fashionable Life." It furnished abundant talk and discussion for a week, and every one who had luckily been at the breakfast was at a premium.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTY-SECOND .

CASE AGAINST MAJOR CARTER.

WHILE the hubbub goes on, and people are stopping each other in streets and clubs, asking, "I say, what's this business about Carter?" we may look back some weeks to that stormy night at Bangor, when young Doctor Jones was away, and Miss Manuel, like an avenging angel, sitting before the old man, who was crouching in his chair. She literally wrung the whole story from him in bits and patches.

First, he recollected Major Carter, with his wife, coming to the place, and had seen them walking about very often. She, he had noticed, was so quiet and white, and always had her timid eye fixed on the major, as if expecting something. Her voice was gentle, and she feared her husband. The major very often, said the old man, came into the shop, and talked, and talked pleasantly too, but not so much to him. It was delightful to listen to him; he knew the world so well. He was above them all in this place—miles above them.

The old man's son had just then come home, and had begun to help in the business; and the major fancied him a good deal more than his father. *His* reverence for the major far exceeded that of the old man's. "He can do anything, that man," he often said to his father. "He could be prime minister. He can turn you and me round his finger. We are mere babies to

him." As indeed they were. And with Dr. Watkyn, Major Carter sometimes took a walk, though in a private direction, for he was careful, and saving of his dignity. And young Dr. Watkyn was heard to say often, that he would to Heaven that man could stay for years in the place. His words were like gold.

Presently, Mrs. Carter, always ailing, began to become ill regularly, and the major became changed into the most devoted of nurses.

"I was brought to see her," said the old man, "and my son was brought too. And I will confess that, being accustomed only to the plain, intelligible sicknesses of our rough country people, and my son having much the same sort of experience, we could not make much of the matter. The major had all the feeling in the world, and tried to help us as well as he could; but what could be made of a lady who was wasting and wasting, and growing sick, and then growing well, and then wasting again? We could only call it consumption. At last, on one Sunday night, when we had been at meeting—Must I tell you?"

Miss Manuel, with her eyes on the coals, said, impassively, "Go on."

Those Welsh coals, long undermined like a little quarry, suddenly crumbled down and made him start. "Go on," she said again. "Finish."

"Ah, begin, you should say," he replied, "for it is all to come yet. That night I had been rummaging among our old jars and jugs, looking for some calomel, and found, as you have often found, perhaps, a heap of things that I had no idea I had. As I was rummaging and dusting, the major came in and sat down despondingly upon a chair. 'Worse to-night, Jones,' he said. 'Only think, the faithful partner, who has held to me, come weal, come woe, for so many years!'

"At this moment, a neighbour came in with a long story about his wife, Jenkin, who was lying ill, and could get no sleep at night from a herd of cats who had their meetings at the back of his house. 'Give me some poison, doctor,' he said."

"I recollected finding among the other things a little strychnine, which got there I don't know how. I gave him some, and went out to the door with him to talk over the state of his wife, leaving the major behind leaning his head on his hand."

Miss Manuel slowly turned her face away from the coals, and was looking eagerly at him.

"I only say this," said the old man, looking restlessly from side to side. "Two days later, the neighbour came back for more of the poison, which had done good work, and I never could find it. Even that night I missed one of the bottles, but I did not know it was *that* one. When the neighbour came again I could not find it, and something whispered me that the major had taken it. It seemed unjust—unreasonable—wicked; but the idea took possession of me."

The wind, long kept waiting, was now thundering at the old bow-window, as if it had suddenly found a shoulder, and was driving furiously with that shoulder against the door.

The old man shrunk away in terror, and stopped for a moment.

"The neighbour came pretty often—for he was anxious about his wife—to see if I had found it, and came often, too, when the major was sitting in the parlour. 'What a fuss,' he said one day, in a pet, 'about that wretched stuff! I never come in here but you are harping on it. Give that fellow something else, and have done with him.'

"'Well,' said I, 'major, it was very odd the way' it disappeared.'

"'Very odd!' he said, impatiently; 'in this wild nest of confusion, it is a wonder you can find anything.'

"My son had to go up to the major's wife the next night, who was very ill indeed, in something like catalepsy. 'A new shape, father,' he said to me, when he came home. 'That woman is running the round of every sickness in the Clinical Medicine. I can make nothing of her. There she is, now chattering and trembling, and her spine going like a pendulum——'"

"What idle stuff this is!" said Miss Manuel, suddenly. "All foolish dreams! And this is your story? You mislay a dusty old bottle, and you talk of poisoning! A nightmare."

"Ah! I wish it were," said he, crooning the words out sorrowfully. "But my son, a week later, searching in a cupboard in her room when the major had gone down, found the very bottle (for it had a special make)—I wish *that* had been a nightmare!"

Again Miss Manuel's eyes sparkled with interest. She said, "You know something more."

"Ay," said he, "and that she herself told us. That is her scared looks at him. Never for a single moment—and this I remarked—did he allow any one to be in the room with her

without being there himself. He was on guard always. Once she half whispered to me, 'For God's sake send me no more' (drugs, she meant), 'they are killing me;' and that moment he came with some cooling drink for her.

"'No, no! no more,' she said, half rising up in her bed. 'I will have nothing else. Ask these doctors. I shall die soon; but not by——'

"'Hush, hush!' said the major, laying his hand on her shoulder. 'This is for your good, dear. You *must* take the things. Look! I should ask nothing better myself.' And he drank some of it with relish, and with his eyes fixed upon her. She hung down her head and took it silently. "Ah," he said, with a sigh, 'someway we two have never understood each other through our lives, and never will. It is too late, I fear, now.' I believed in the major that night.

"Two nights after, Mrs. Carter died. They came running for me (I was stronger then than I am now) about eleven o'clock, and I went up. She was shaking and chattering with her teeth clenched, and the major and his son holding her by the wrists. I never heard such shrieks and such signs of agony. Her eyes were starting out of her head. But we could do nothing. Towards morning she got quiet, and by six, when one of those spasms was coming on again, went off with a shriek, and a sort of jump into the air.

"Two days after she was buried, the major came to me in my parlour. He was in deep grief, and wanted a certificate of her death, and the cause of her death. It was a matter of form. I was very silent, and, I suppose, suspicious. 'Why do you want this?' I said.

"'As a matter of form,' he said, 'I must look to these things for the sake of my son. It is odious to me at this time, when I should be at the grave of my wife; but some one must look to these things. We must have this, to get some little property to which she is entitled.'

"'How?' I said. 'Through a will?'

"'Oh, that is no matter,' he said, shortly. 'All I want is the formal paper, just to satisfy those insurance people.'

"I started up. 'Oh, it was an insurance, then? Ah, Major Carter!'

'He stamped his foot. 'What do you mean?' he said, turning on me. 'Take care! No tricks of this sort. I warn you it will be dangerous trying them with me.'

"'But I don't know,' I said (he had quite scared me), 'what

I am to sign. I know *no* cause of death. It seems all mysterious.'

" 'Then,' said he, promptly, 'try your "post mortem." Look for yourselves, both of you. I give full permission. If you doubt your own skill in these matters, get some one else that *has* skill, and I will pay. What is it you are at?' My son here came in, and Major Carter addressed him. 'What is this humour your father has got into?' he said. 'I can't follow him. He is hesitating about giving the plain formal thing always given. God knows I have trouble enough without having old men's scruples to remove. See to it, Watkyn, do. I am tired and sick.'

"I am weak, I am afraid, but my son spoke with me, and reasoned with me, and showed me what he thought was the folly of these scruples. Later, too, when the major's cold eye fell upon me, it quite terrified me. That night he came back when my son had just gone out, stayed exactly a minute, but during that minute fixed that dreadful eye upon me, and said, coldly and distinctly, 'Mind what you are about, and take a friendly hint. I have crushed many as obscure, as an obscure country doctor. Take care I don't stamp you under my foot. Be wise;' and he threw the paper down on the table; 'make up your weak mind before the night is over!'

"Well, I signed that night, and—and have had a weight upon my conscience ever since. It has put ten years to my sixty years, and has made me decrepit and miserable. These stormy nights, which come so often, make me tremble. Listen! there it goes; and I often think, if I were to be called away in one of these wild hurricanes—what——"

For more than an hour he sat and cowered under Miss Manuel's eye, sometimes shrinking away in alarm, and stopping short in what he was telling; refusing, in abject terror, to say more. Then would come a burst of the wind, and a sudden howl from the storm outside, and he would shrink and fling his head into the cushions of his chair, as if it were the earth. When he looked up again, he would see the calm face of Miss Manuel opposite to him, like a judgment. He was driven on. When all he had to tell had been wrung from him, one of the wild hurricanes came down the street, and brought with it the clatter and the roar and the metallic jingling of dislodged slates cantering down the street on their edge. With it, too, came the sound of horses' feet and of wheels, which stopped suddenly at the door. Then there were voices. The old man was on his feet in an agony of terror.

"It is a judgment on me," he said. "He is come again, and he will tell that man, and I shall be destroyed. Go! go quick! leave me here. Oh, if he should find you——"

"Hush!" said Miss Manuel. "You may trust me. No one shall know a word, not even the whisper of a word." And she had flown to the door, and was up-stairs in her room in a second.

It was the son come home. The eminent country doctor had by some accident been beforehand with him. The pink Welshman was soured. He started when he saw his father at the door. "Not in bed!" he said, roughly. "What work is this? What have you been at? Come!"

The old man quavered out some excuse about having fallen asleep. But the son was suspicious, with the suspicion, too, of ill humour, and went away lowering at the pale and trembling father. He was yet more suspicious when Miss Manuel announced that she was going away, and took an early train to London. Most joyful was the maid in whose service she was.

Later, Mr. Speedy, and, later still, the Crown solicitors, came to gather up yet further details. They groped and ferreted here and there, but they found the scent had grown cold. There were terrible gaps, and a dozen links wanting here and there, and no dexterity of the legal whitesmith could join them. Still, there was "a fair case" to go to a jury on—a case handsomely suspicious. But misfortunes came thickly. Old Doctor Jones died suddenly; and though his testimony, such as it was, was forthcoming in another shape, still it would not have such an effect "with the jury." An eminent *Nisi Prius* advocate had been secured for the prisoner, who would "knock to pieces" the "wretched case for the Crown," made up, as it was, of "old medicine bottles," and of the damaged capacities of a miserable old dotard, who "crooned" all day and night over a fire, and who, his neighbours would show, had not been in his right mind for years. Claypop, M.P., "in his place" in the House, put a question to the Home Secretary, and threatened to move for papers and correspondence, and the Home Secretary said he would communicate with the legal advisers of the Crown. In various newspapers there were articles headed "Major Carter's Case." It was taken up so warmly, and every day grew so weak, that presently all proceedings were dropped. It was spoken of by Major Carter's "friends" as "a conspiracy." But Mr. Speedy and the insurance office kept him at bay; and certainly Major Carter—never attempted to enforce his claim by process of law.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTY-THIRD.

THE "MODERATES' CLUB."

THE town still talked for some days of this "painful" business, and a morning penny journal had a gaudy leading article, worked in all the rich colours of word painting. At the Moderates' Club, Sir Hopkins Pocock, now become faintly querulous, and with a grievance in his pocket which he took out to show every one that he met, acquired some little importance by his patent rights in previous portions of the major's history. "I know all about him; I know all about him," he said, pushing himself into a knot of Moderators. "Bless you! there was a very curious business at Monaco, long ago. I never told of it before; but *now*——" And then Sir Hopkins began a calumnious little history about a bill, and the clergyman of the place's son, who was only fourteen, sir, and looked twelve ("quite a child! Oh, it was very bad!"); by reason of which adventure the major had to hurry away precipitately from the place. Into which little story, however, he managed to introduce so many ingenious references to his own hard condition, and to the cruel way in which his public services had been acknowledged, that the more youthful Moderators yawned in his face, and, going away, told other Moderators that "Old Pocock was at it again."

To this society belonged Romaine and Fermor, and many more of the same standing. It was a little select, more fashionable than political, and to Romaine's exertions Fermor had indeed owed his entrance. This obligation—with some more of the same social cast—he was now carrying about like a coal of fire on his head. On this night Fermor was dining by himself at a lonely table, full of bitterness. The club joint was tasteless to him; for, close by, with his back to him, was Romaine with three others dining in great spirits, and Romaine more sarcastic, boisterous, noisy, and even insolent, than usual. Old gentlemen, busy with their newspapers, protested with fierce looks against his merriment. They were talking of the wedding.

"I knew it all along," said Romaine, in a noisy burst. "I told every man I met it would come to a business. Ask Wallis! And yet a good fellow! I am sorry for him, I am indeed. He was always civil to me. I believe it is a conspiracy; or, if it's not, it's all one. I like him the better for it. I wish all the

old wives in the world could be got rid of in the same way. I do, on my soul! But he had enemies—dozens of them. I have reason to know it."

"Tell us about it, Romaine," said some of the others. "*Do now.*"

"Oh, it will all come out by-and-by," said he. "They want to turn him into a felon. I suspect a certain lady-friend of ours to be at the bottom of it; one of your fine flashing Judith-and-Holofernes pattern."

"Bet you a sovereign I name her," said a man opposite him. "Alfred-place! eh?"

"Keep your sovereign for your tailor, my friend," said Romaine, contemptuously. "For a wonder, you have made a guess. You all know," he said, dropping his voice, "that Miss Manuel! She has done the thing, I'll swear! I know her touch! It's so shabby, and so like a woman: all about a sister of hers."

"She's a fine woman, though," said the "man" who had offered the sovereign.

"Fine woman!" said Romaine, with disgust. "I hate to hear fellows talk in that way, as if they were speaking of joints of meat. Fine or not fine, I dislike her. She is dangerous and spiteful. I recommend all here to keep clear of her."

Fermor listened, and heard all this with tingling cheeks. Her name to be bandied about in this low way in a public room, before waiters and "men!" Long he had been watching for an opportunity of some quarrel with Romaine; some reasonable opening, when he could "put him down." It seemed to be now hurrying on.

Romaine had turned suddenly, and had seen Fermor. "Oh, ho!" he said, "we must mind what we say. How de do, Fermor? He is one of her sacred band. Don't denounce us, Fermor."

There were a dozen feet between Fermor and the others. Over such a space he could not bring himself to hurl back the retort he wished; so he made no answer.

Presently Romaine and his men went away noisily to the smoking-room, and then to the billiard-room. Fermor got up promptly and followed them. He never took his eyes off Romaine. The other seemed to understand him perfectly, and, as he smoked and played, kept up a running fire of strokes at him all the night. Young Brett presently dropped in and looked on.

"*That's* the style," said Romaine, pocketing a ball with extraordinary violence. "Look at that, Fermor! That's the way *I* treat any man, woman, or child, that interferes with *my* play. Pocket them, eh?"

He looked at Fermor insolently as he walked past him to make a fresh stroke.

"Who is going to the fancy ball, rout, whatever it is?" asked Romaine, again stooping to play. "I am, I know. I have arranged a tableau for myself—my own actors. Ring, Brett, like a good lad, for brandies and sodas. I wish there was a company to lay on soda in the streets like a main. I'd pay what rates they asked. I hear Fermor here is going with a lantern and cloak as Guy Fawkes—ha, ha! There we go again! Nothing like it. What dress is your fine friend going in, eh, Fermor? The Queen of Sheba, eh? I should like to tell *that* lady some home truths. For the world I would not breathe her name in a mixed company, of course; but Fermor understands perfectly."

Three of the men suddenly went out. Fermor, boiling furiously at the recollection of past injuries, thinking, too, of the rebellion at home, thought the moment was come. He had a thought, too, of some false chivalry, as he fancied himself the champion of Miss Manuel. He jumped from his place.

"I have put up with this too long," he said. "I won't bear it. You have laid yourself out the whole evening to insult me. I tell you I won't bear it."

"Well, do not," said Romaine, getting his cue into position. "Just stand a little away, my friend, and continue your remarks at the other side of the table."

"I will not listen to your slanders—and on a lady! It is infamous, unworthy! Before leaving this room, you must retract—I tell you, you shall."

Romaine laughed loudly and good humouredly. "We have stirred you up," he said—"and with a billiard cue. However, let us hear you out. Go on. Well?"

"I say, Fermor, Fermor," said Young Brett, anxiously, "what are you at?"

"He *must* retract," said Fermor, excitedly. "I'll have none of his insolent speeches at me! I shan't be made the butt of his smart words. You heard him. Every one here heard him. I have long been wanting the opportunity."

"Nonsense," said Young Brett. "Don't you see it is all a joke?"

"Don't interfere with me, Mr. Brett," said Fermor, turning on him. "This man understands me perfectly; and it is a long account. He has other things to reckon with me for. *He knows it.*"

"Well," said Romaine, suddenly becoming grave, and resting on his billiard cue. "Well, here I am now, and here is the opportunity. Shut the door, Brett, like a good boy. Now, let us hear all about it. I am now before you, Mr. Fermor, or *Captain Fermor*. I only give you a caution in the friendliest spirit imaginable; don't try anything of *this* sort," he said, doubling his fingers. "I never boast; but I give you my word of honour, I broke a man's skull in a fall, who *did* try it. I didn't intend it. Now, what is it you want?"

Fermor glared at him. "Not boast!" he said. "I am no match for you at *that*, I know. But——"

"No, you are not," said the other, "nor at anything else. Do you want pistols, and police on the ground, and all London laughing at us? A cheap way of getting a reputation for bravery. Are you for a theatrical duel, with the principals arrested and bound over? A public challenge in the public room of a club! Not a soul to know of it! I admire you—upon my soul I do. Now what else do you want, Mr. Fermor?"

More "men" were dropping in now, brought by that curious instinct which leads men to the scene of a commotion. There was a sort of a little audience. Romaine's eye rested on him, and Romaine's hand rested on the cue.

Fermor did not feel easy under that eye. He tried a poor abortion of a sneer. "I have no knack," he said, "at those smart words. I am not a match for you at——"

Again Romaine laughed with noisy good humour. "Indeed you are not, Fermor. Neither at billiards, nor at the gloves, nor at the tongue, nor at anything else in the world."

"I thought you never boasted!" struck in Fermor, bitterly.

"Oh, sometimes—a little," said the other. "We are all weak, you know. Now, my friend, while you are making up your mind as to what you are going to do, pray let me go on with my game. There! the old story. Pocket again. Ha, ha!" Fermor almost ground his teeth with rage. But he had a curious shyness, which in presence of a crowd palsied his wits, if not his tongue. He could have readily found such rough stock words as, "you are a ruffian, a coward," and the like. But, to do him justice, he shrank from such Billingsgate. The "men" looked on, wondering. If faces could stab, wound,

beat, scourge, then was Romaine tied to a stake, and gashed and scourged thoroughly. But, as it was, he saw that he had the victory.

"What is it all about?" said the "men."

"We have been having an argument, Fermor and I," he said, "and I believe I have the best of it. Another good stroke."

At last the games ended, the night ended, the "men" dropped away. "Now to get our great coat," said Romaine. "I have made a very good night's work of it, beaten everybody all round," and he looked at Fermor. He lit a cigar at the door. Fermor followed him close.

"Well," said an old member, "well, Fermor, you are about the most even-tempered man I ever came across. Hang me! but I would have slapped him in the face—I would."

Fermor paused, bit his moustache, and then flew out after Romaine.

"You don't mean to tell me you are coming *my way*?" said Mr. Romaine. "Well, well."

"You shall not escape me now," said Fermor, walking hurriedly beside him. "You have no audience here. ~~Once for~~ all, you must account to me for your behaviour. I have you here."

"Beginning again?" said Romaine, buttoning up his coat, and puffing away at his cigar. "Hints, lessons, all thrown away, I see."

"It is unbearable," said Fermor, walking furiously. "You have no spirit. Any other man would have——You are a——"

"Hush, hush, nonsense," said Romaine. "I don't think you know the full force of what you are saying. As you say, there is no audience here, and you are getting courage. My good friend, it is well you did not bring out that ugly word that was on your lips. I tell you calmly and candidly, if you had——"

"Well?" said Fermor, trying a sneer.

"Well? I should have waited until we came to this lamp-post, seized you, and I fear—broken your spine. If you doubt me, just as an experiment try and say it. Come!"

Under the lamplight came from Romaine's eye such a sharp, wicked flash, and there was such an Indian savageness about his lips, that Fermor saw in a second that he was in earnest.

Luckless Fermor! it was the deepest humiliation. But there was a ferocity in the other's face that could not be trifled with.

But some one else stopped suddenly under the lamp, started, and spoke.

"Fermor!" he said, "here! What is this about?"

"Ah, Hanbury!" Romaine said. "I am so glad. Come and look. Look at our friend. He has been a little pettish to-night—given me all manner of trouble."

This was, indeed, humiliation. Hanbury felt for him.

"Come, come," he said, "this is the public street. Come, let us go. Do, now."

"It is the public street, my friend," said the other, gaily. "That is just the reason."

"Here, I want to speak to you, Romaine. Look—suppose some of the club men were to pass? Nonsense. You have had enough amusement."

He was very strong—stronger than Romaine—and gently and good humouredly drew him away.

"It won't do, after all, Fermor! You will have to pay a fellow, as they do in Ireland, and get *him* to do the job. There's your hat. Don't try that again, I would advise you. Now don't persist in seeing me home. In fact, my good Fermor, as a general rule, don't think of interfering with me."

Fermor was now free. All his fury burst out. He drew back, and was going to fly at Romaine, but the latter threw his cigar on the ground, and, raising his arm, said, in a tone there was no mistaking, "Take care, take care! Hanbury, I give you notice, I shall not put up with any tricks of this sort. Take care, now. I warn you."

Hanbury stepped between them. He *saved* Fermor. "Go home," he said, "Fermor; it is all a joke."

Romaine walked away very fast, and even singing, and left the unhappy Fermor glowering, almost moaning, with rage. But he was half tamed. "This man has a spell over me," he said, passionately. The moment Romaine was gone he felt a frantic impulse to rush after him, and again "bring him to account." He went home that night degraded to himself, and the men at the club were very jocular over the "devilish diverting way" that Romaine had handled him.

The spectacle had, however, troubled young Brett, that excellent Samaritan, not a little. He understood what was in Fermor's mind, and he began to pity him. He was *his* old friend, and his old friend he had admired so. "He was no match," he thought, "for that rude rough man." So this honest boy was with Miss Manuel next day, telling her the whole. "I am sorry for him,

indeed I am," he said. "I wish I could help him. And indeed, Miss Manuel, you have a friend in him, for he was fighting *your* battle like a trump. Not, indeed, that any one was saying anything—that is——" And he stopped in some confusion.

Pauline smiled. "Do you think I mind? You may tell me the truth. They were abusing me, and he defended me. Well?"

"Defended you!" said Young Brett, with enthusiasm; "it was a regular championship. He would have fought Romaine for you. Really, he wanted to have him out at once. You ought to like him, I say, Miss Manuel."

After Young Brett was gone, Miss Manuel thought of this with softness. "It is something to have a friend," she said, "and if I had any influence with him for *her* sake, I might use it to bring him back to that child who hates me so." Later, she sat down and wrote, and directed a letter to Captain Fernor.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTY-FOURTH.

NEWS FOR LADY LAURA.

THIS was now the day of Lady Laura's great festival. Everything had been hurried on, and everything was ready—under her captaincy. She had found money, time, stage properties, people, everything; for, even in their own department, Blanche and Laura junior were to all intents and purposes utterly helpless. She would have turned out the same in any department. Had she been suddenly appointed to the commissariat she would have found a sudden instinct for the duties, and have performed them quite as well as the men of the regular service. She now showed that she knew about scenes and about painting, and with good sense directed the working hands whom she was obliged—alas! at great cost—to have in. She even trained Laura junior and Blanche, and taught them some happy and effective poses. She found time for all this, and it was not known that the charming Swiss shepherdess dress, in which Laura was to appear, had been privately put together by those old, and worn, and untiring fingers, though popularly believed to be a triumph of Madame Adelaide's skill. She had been a little disturbed at

Young Spendlesham's absence from the wedding breakfast ; but she soon discovered that he had been called away suddenly to the country, but would be back that evening positively. For the moment she had been disquieted, but this news set everything straight.

On this last day she was everywhere—in working clothes, as it were. She overlooked the men putting up a canopy at the hall door, and others busy forming the balcony into a temporary chamber, which she knew would be valuable for the purposes for which she had lived. These were sad expenses ; but they were of the last necessity, and she had got them put up far cheaper than any man or woman in town could have had them put up. Nor was she without hopes of profit for her outlay ; for already she seemed to detect on the edge of the web she had spun round Laura junior (Laura junior was incapable of forming a web for herself), a figure of fair proportions looking in curiously. That night might see him floundering helplessly in the net. Success brings success, just as eating brings on appetite.

To this day, too, many had been looking forward. But in the ~~Fermor~~ house it was to bring on a crisis. That unhappy gentleman had come home—degraded it may be—but full of miserable pique and rage, that could not find the object it desired, but thirsted for a victim. He associated Mrs. Fermor with his treatment. "If I die for it," he said, "she shall not have this opportunity!" It was remarked by the ladies and gentlemen below, that the lord and lady of the house "did not speak" now. News of the family émeutes had penetrated to neighbouring areas. Mrs. Fermor—to whose injuries every day's neglect added—met his treatment with stern defiance, and was girding herself up for this last struggle.

Not, indeed, that she cared for that wretched show. She shrank from it, and from the unknown issues that rested on it. But her coral lips, a little thinner than they had been, were pressed together with the tightness of defiance. One soft word, and they had been relaxed ; but she only saw corresponding defiance, and a sort of unconditional hostility.

It was a gloomy day, and seemed charged with presentiments. Later on, towards the evening, came the servant to know at what hour the carriage would be wanted. Mrs. Fermor was passing up-stairs, and she heard her lord in the hall below, saying in a loud sour voice, "It is not wanted to-night. Who said it was? What does the fellow come worrying here for? He will be sent to if required."

"He was told to call, sir. Mrs. Fermor sent me."

"I tell you he is not wanted," said Fermor, furiously.

And the serving gentleman, at the evening tea, informed his friends below that up-stairs they would be "hat it again afore night!"

Mrs. Fermor, on the stairs, heard this interdict of the carriage. "So he wants to drive me to extremities," she said. "Let him, then. Here, John!" she called out, "don't let the man go yet." And she stepped down excitedly—to battle.

She shut the study door. "What is this about the carriage?" she said, trying to speak calmly. "I shall want it to-night."

"Is it to go to this thing, pray?" he answered her.

"No matter for what purpose," she replied. "I am entitled to it. I am sure you don't intend to expose our affairs to the talk of the people below."

"Not for that. I told you before I don't choose you to go to that place. I am determined, I know, and I want no argument about it."

"That remains to be seen," he said, her foot beating the floor. "I am going. Fortunately, there are *other* carriages to be got."

"Mr. Romaine's, I suppose?" he said, with a sneer.

"Mr. Romaine is a gentleman, and a true friend to me," she answered, with trembling voice. "He would not expose me in this way."

"You had better go with him in a cab, I suppose," said he. "Don't talk to me about him. I don't wish it. I have made up my mind, and I have told you so, and I give no reasons. There!"

"No wonder you don't like to talk of him," she went on, quite flaming with excitement; "you are brave to me, but I know you are in terror of him."

Fermor turned white. This allusion was but an accident, but it seemed as though she had heard about *that* night, and was taunting him. He started up, and pointed to the door. "Oh! after *this*," he said, almost choking, "go! go! leave me. *Now* we understand each other. Go away, I say. I shall end *this* in some way—and before long, too. It is all over now."

He did not know what he was saying or what he was doing. She was a little scared, because not understanding the real reason of his fury, and let the man go without a word about the carriage. But when she was alone, the original defiance returned, and, according to the old formula, emphasised with a

little fierce stamp; "if she was to die for it," she would not yield.

It was now past six o'clock. Fermor was still raging in his study. He heard voices in the hall, and burst out. "What is this? What is this noise?" It was another "man" with a message from Madame Gay's. The grand dress would be home at eight, punctually; it might be depended on. There were some alterations; but a dozen hands were working on it simultaneously, like slaters on a roof. Fermor retreated into his study, trembling, but with a grim idea in his head.

At Lady Laura's house the moment was drawing on. By incredible exertion everything had been got ready, and the "men" happily out of the house. The last touches had been given, and we know by whom. Indeed, the first and middle, as well as the last touches, had all come from the same hand. Tired, fagged, but dressed in her finery (the first "down," too, for Laura junior and Blanche were always late), she was in the field, walking round her rooms, now clear, clean, fresh, and lighted. Here, in the drawing-room, was that pretty stage at one end, and the flowers, and the lights; and here, below, was the supper set out, under the same superintendence, with a small corps of select and steady waiters, who were known to be equal to more work, at the same tariff, than their fellows. The women were waiting to take the cloaks—in fact, all was ready. She went up again after this final survey, and stood at the fire alone in her room, trying to warm her weary foot upon the fender. As she looked down on that weary foot, and then looked into the coals, perhaps she saw there, in the little fiery crags and gullies, scraps of that weary panorama she called her life, the course that she had worked out with weariness and buffeting. Perhaps, too, she was hoping that, just as the little fiery craters and precipices crumbled down upon one another, so her life, too, might end at last; or perhaps was wishing for some final repose—just as her worn and aching head was then longing for some physical repose upon a pillow. It was noted after how in these days people under her found her softer and less imperious and fretful.

The clock on the chimney-piece had struck nine. Every one had been enjoined to be there early, on account of the dramatic part. The company were now about due. Hark to the rolling of the carriages. Whatever she had been thinking of, whether sad or hopeful, she now withdrew the weary foot from the fender, and "recovered" herself. Who would come first? for

there was the thunder of wheels at the gate, and the quick plunge of horses suddenly checked; and here was the smile of reception snatched hurriedly, as it were, from her pocket, and fitted on. Behind it was, perhaps, a real smile, for she was thinking of *Blanche's* or *Laura junior's* lovers.

As she took her post at the door (the arrived were undrapping below, and receiving a scrap of visiting card as a token), the select waiter came up with a note on a salver. An apology, of course, which was welcome; for she always left a margin for such things, and room was sadly wanted. She thought she knew the hand. It was from Sir John Westende.

"I never asked *him*," she said, wondering. Then she read it with a strange stare, that mystified the waiter, who was standing by, salver in hand:—

"DEAR LADY LAURA,—My duty to my ward, Lord Spendlesham, has compelled me to take a course I much regret. For many reasons I could not approve of the alliance he was about making, but in a conversation which I had with him to-day, I *at last* prevailed on him to take the view which is best ~~for~~ ^{for his} own interest. The thing, as you will admit, is wholly out of the question. He is in full possession of all details—quite adopts the view that I take, and is now down at my house in the country. But, with a generosity which does him honour, he has proposed to let *you* take the business of breaking the affair off on yourself. And if you think fit to adopt this course, you will write to him to-night a letter to that effect. It is a very painful and unfortunate business altogether, but you will see, with your usual good sense, that it was quite impossible it could go on.

"I am, dear Lady Laura,

"Yours truly,

"JOHN WESTENDE."

Did she utter a sound beyond a sigh, or did the "steady" waiter see pass across her face more than a short spasm? He was now chanting "Mr. and Mrs. Henry Wandesforde! Miss Wandesforde." And those guests were defiling up the stairs, Mr. Wandesforde pulling hard at his gloves. Mrs. Wandesforde's wrists chinked with the sound of rattling bracelets as she received the hostess's warm welcome. Mr. Wandesforde's figure, in a sort of annular eclipse, and partially in shadow from clouds of tulle in front, bowed from a distance. *He did not*

suspect what ghastliness was behind the smile that greeted them. Then the stream set in, and began to ascend steadily.

Now came Laura junior rustling down (Blanche was above, in the Swiss peasant's dress). The mother went through all the routine duties earnestly and with activity. She was in motion always—in the motion of speech when not in that of figure. She went through all the features of the part without omitting a single thing. She had a word for all. She carried on the thing "behind the scenes." She flew up to her daughter—poor Blanche, in the Swiss peasant's dress—and encouraged her kindly, and with sympathy, to do her part well. Those words fell strangely on Blanche's ear.

"Has he come, mamma?" she asked, settling the "bands" of the peasant dress.

"By-and-by, dear," said mamma, in a hollow voice. "I am afraid he will not be here till late—he has written to say so. But that makes no matter, you know. You are looking charming, dear, in that dress."

And Blanche, a good girl, perhaps, after seeing a patch of warm sunlight—a sunlight something like affection—on that worn, broken landscape, put up her lips and kissed her. Talk of the Greek play-writers and their terrible element of fate and necessity, here was as fine a bit of tragedy as they could have thought of.

The show began, and the show went on. She never relaxed. Mr. Romaine had come to the front, anxious to consult her about Mrs. Fermor. She had not come. "We could not begin without her, you know," he said.

"Oh, we can send for her, to be sure," said Lady Laura, with alacrity.

"And Spendlesham," said Romaine, "what is he about? No one seems to be in time."

"Later—all later," said Lady Laura, with a smile. "There is no hurry, you see."

"Well, then, we may begin," said Mr. Romaine, "and I myself will go for—the Fermors."

John Hanbury was there beside him, and almost heard his speech. Romaine gave him a bitter look of impatience. He was caring very little for the show of that night. He was thinking of some other place.

It began with the Parting of Hector and Andromache, the Trojan hero, in fine foil armour, depicted by young Wainwright: the tearful wife by the lovely Cecilia Towler, Lady Towler's

eldest. There was appropriate music, suggestive of Troy and the hostile Greeks; and the "Parting," lasting about a minute, the tableau was over. Lady Laura was seen applauding. They all thought how she was enjoying it. Mr. Romaine, out on the landing, and biting his nails, was restless and impatient. Finally, he "plunged" down stairs angrily and left the house. John Hanbury, who had been watching his motions quietly, very soon after glided down stairs, and also left the house.

But in Fermor's house, with Fermor sitting in his study as in a den watching jealously for something, the same state of things continued on that dismal evening. Some one else was watching as feverishly up-stairs.

"So *he* has told her," he thought, pacing up and down, "and she *dares* to taunt me. I shall break her down yet." He stopped, for he heard a sound of feet and shuffling in the hall. It was the sound he was looking for. A man had come with a great black box, a huge casket, containing the treasure.

The dozen hands simultaneously busy on the dress had it finished to the moment—some one walking up and down, and urging them on as an overseer does the galley-slaves at the oar. It was sent home to the minute, for Madame Gay was nice about her reputation. Fermor came out of the den. This night he was sadly excited—so excited as to do what at another time he would have thought ungentlemanly.

"Bring that in here," he said.

Mrs. Fermor's own maid was tripping down to welcome the treasure, to take it out into her own arms. There was great curiosity in the house as to how "missus" would look in the "playacting" dress.

"Bring that in here!" repeated Fermor, fiercely; "box and all. Do you hear me? Must I tell you everything in this house twice over?"

It was brought in without a word. The lady's maid flew up-stairs to her mistress with the news.

"*Now*," thought Fermor, locking the door, and getting his hat, "we shall see." Madame Gay's great black box lay there—imprisoned—an unaccustomed atmosphere. To the old sane Fermor of years back it would have seemed, perhaps, a pitiful, little, unworthy, and perhaps ungentlemanly trick.

As he went out, a man came up the steps with a note. It was Miss Manuel's note. He knew the handwriting at once, and hurried to the light in a flurry; he read it under a street lamp—read it in a wild tumult of agitation.

Miss Manuel had written :—

"I cannot delay thanking you for a kindness, the news of which has just reached me. I mean the way in which you took my part yesterday. Such behaviour is like heaping coals of fire on my head. I do not deserve it—indeed no—for if you knew what I dare not tell you, but which is yet a vile hypocrisy not to tell you, you would, I know, *despise me*. Some of these days, perhaps, you shall know. And yet I shall venture to ask a favour when I see you again—one that concerns yourself and your interests."

His head seemed to swim with wild triumph as he read. "It is true, then," he thought. "She owns it! It is what I have long suspected. She loves me! She has been struggling with it. Ah! I am the old Fermor still!"

The quietness of home was ungrateful to him—its fierce rebellion it was misery and pain to think of. Here was hope, brightness, and a sort of ghost of the old pride and elation.

"*She loves me*," he thought, walking fast. "*She esteems and values me*. With her I can feel hope, and joy, and love, and happiness. She cannot suppress what she feels." Suddenly a wild impulse seized him. He had thought of answering the letter at once, in a sort of rapturous tone; but it would be better to go to her straight himself. In a moment he was in a Hansom cab, galloping towards Alfred-place. The driver did not know that the wild heart of his fare was travelling faster than the good horse in the shafts.

Mrs. Fermor, told by her maid of this last blow, sat on her chair before her glass in her bedroom. "You may go down, Wallace," she said. "Or stay, bring me up my papers and pens." She was almost stupefied at this last stroke of poor impotent spite, but more mortified at the whole house being made parties to the quarrel. "To disgrace me in this way!" she said, in a frantic burst of tears. "But I will baffle him yet. Now he shall find that I can meet him. God help me! *But he is driving me to this*." And she wrote a hasty note to Mr. Romaine :—

"Come to me quickly. I want to see you and consult you.

"M. F."

CHAPTER THE SEVENTY-FIFTH.

MR. ROMAINE'S PROPOSALS.

M. F. ! even in these initials there was an unlawful confidence. As she was folding the note, her "own maid" appeared at the door, and said that Mr. Romaine was below in the drawing-room. Mr. Romaine's cab was waiting at the door. He had come post from Lady Laura's.

Her hair was down on her shoulders. She hastily "turned it up" in some fashion—in any way. She looked beautiful, brilliant with the sense of suffering outrage, and suppressed grief and anger. For the moment it seemed to her—poor little soul!—that Providence had sent her this man to be her protector and friend. "Heaven has raised me up this true friend," she thought, with an odd perversion of devotion. "I shall cling to him now." She flew down, and ran to him like a bird fluttering. He started back, she looked so bright and engaging.

"Oh," she said, "Mr. Romaine, I am so glad you have come to me. I was writing to you, to beg, to implore, that you would——"

"Good gracious!" he said, "what has happened? Tell me everything."

"You are my friend," she went on, hastily; "at least, I have begun to think you are; and I do not know what to do. I am miserable, wretched, unhappy. I have no one to help me, no one to care for me," and bright tears began to gather in the bright eyes.

Romaine was looking at the soft helpless creature with pure sympathy and admiration. "Do you tell me," said he, with contracting brows, "that he has been at his work again? It is insufferable. I thought I had given him a lesson last night that would have lasted him for years."

"Oh," said she, bursting out helplessly, "he does not know me. He treats me cruelly. He does not understand me."

"Indeed he does not," said Romaine, moodily; "not he. No teaching will do him good. Never, I see. What do you suppose he was doing last night? Championing Miss Manuel before a whole club; trying to quarrel with me about her. I had to give him a lesson. Dearest Mrs. Fermor, I do feel for you. I wish to Heaven I could show you how I do feel. What is this business now? I can guess. This tyrant will not let you go. I

know it! What a mean, pitiful, unworthy spite! Good Heavens! what a shame! what a sin!" he went on. "My heart bleeds for you! But what shall I do, what would you like me to do?"

"No, no," she said, hurriedly. "I suppose he does not think or know what he is doing."

"He does. He does," said Romaine, savagely. "Where is he now? Ah, I could guess. But look, dearest child, you will not submit to this. Your life will become a slavery worse than they have in Siberia. He will encroach every day more and more. If you yield to him, he will only require more. My dear, dear Mrs. Fermor, I know you, I know your heart, and all that you have suffered. I do indeed. I am a rough, rude, travelling fellow, but I feel. I shall not let this go on. I can't see a sweet, charming, lovable creature trampled into ruin. We must save you at every risk."

"Save me?" she said, wondering. "How? When? Do you wish me to go to that place? He has my dress locked up in his room."

"*That* place?" he said, impatiently. "I have forgotten it. I am not thinking of that. What does that concern us? I am thinking of your life and happiness. How are you to stay with this man, who will only live to persecute and harass you? Listen to me. We are alone here. Now is the opportunity. Long, long, I have known you—esteemed, admired, loved you—yes, loved you—and never so much as to-night. My heart is bleeding for you. Come, let us leave this house—this house, this country, this mean, *miserable*, degraded man, whom I all but flogged last night."

She started back from him with a cry—as far back as the curtains, which she caught at and clung to. "What dreadful language is this?" she said, frightened. "What do you mean?"

"I do mean it," he said, advancing to her. "I do mean—that I have long seen and loved you—yes, *loved* you. And I tell you it is no crime, or sin, as the cold world would make it. You are not to be sacrificed to a wretch—a monster like that. Heaven has sent me to save you!"

Mrs. Fermor shrank away from him over to the wall. "Oh, go away," she said, in horror. "Oh, God help me! I am betrayed by every one."

"Dearest Mrs. Fermor, not by *me*," he said, coming still nearer. "I am serious. I am in earnest. I have never cared really for any woman yet. But in you, for the first time, I

have seen what I can love and adore. The sufferings you have borne——”

“Go away, *do* go away,” said Mrs. Fermor, shrinking still, and clinging to the curtains. “I did not think you would be so cruel, or so wicked! Oh, this indeed opens my eyes! I am betrayed by every one. Oh, Heaven help me! I have brought this on myself! Oh! Oh!” And she fell upon the sofa in despair and grief.

Romaine looked at her. Miss Manuel's wish was bearing fruit. He had advanced towards her, when a heavy step was heard beside him, and a heavier grasp was laid upon his arm, and a steady, solemn voice rang in his ear—

“Stop! this is manly! Go away! Leave this house.”

“*You* here!” said he, in a fury of impatience. “*Always* in the way! What cursed business makes *you* come intruding?”

“Ah! Mr. Hanbury,” said she, rushing to him. “Help me! help me! All the world is turning against me.”

“You may rely upon *me*, at least,” said Hanbury, sadly, “for such poor help as I can give. First, do you wish this man to remain?”

“No, no, no! a thousand times no!” she said. “But I have brought it on myself. I have been foolish and wicked. I have indeed. And I don't know where to turn to——”

“No, no,” said Hanbury, “you are only too confiding and unsuspecting; but there are plenty of wicked men abroad ready to take advantage of it for their own vile ends.”

“How?” said Romaine, furiously, and advancing on him.

“This is a drawing-room, recollect,” said Hanbury, with contempt. “I do not leave unless Mrs. Fermor requires me. Do you?” he said, turning to her.

“No, no,” she answered him, hastily.

“Do you wish him to go?” he asked, pointing with his finger to Romaine.

“Oh yes,” she said, as eagerly.

“Now,” said Hanbury, “you are a gentleman, I believe, and have experience in the world, and I am sure will understand a hint. You will not intrude in a lady's house?”

With a stamp and a “Very well!” the other turned away.

In a few moments Hanbury was alone with Mrs. Fermor. “Oh, I have brought this all upon myself. It is *my* own doing.”

“Where is Fermor?” said Hanbury. “Shall I bring him——”

"But will *he* save me, or protect me?" she said, wringing her hands; "all—all are the same."

"You must see him," said Hanbury, "and trust to him alone. Ah! it was a pity you cast off Miss Manuel. Hers was a true heart, that loved you, that yearned after you. But you would not trust her."

"She!" said Mrs. Fermor, her face full of doubt. "Why, she is at the bottom of all. She has stolen my husband from me!"

Hanbury almost laughed. "Miss Manuel! How little you know her! Can you trust me? Then I solemnly declare to you some one has been leading you astray for their own views. Ah! It is a pity not to have an instinct for true friendship. Where shall I find Fermor?"

"I don't know, I don't know," she said, distractedly.

Hanbury left her. Some astounding instinct whispered to him, "Alfred-place." At the best, he thought of Miss Manuel as being the one who should come and give confidence to the poor deserted girl.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTY-SIXTH.

NEMESIS.

FERMOR had now got to Alfred-place. While there was a block of carriages and cabs at his mother's house, while the people in the street were stopping to see the shadows cast upon the canvas of the illuminated balcony, and the little procession of ladies flitting from their carriages up the steps into what seemed an open and refulgent furnace door, he was hurriedly getting out of his "Hansom," and entering Miss Manuel's. Could she see him for a moment? he sent up word. ~~She~~ She was above all conventionality, and saw him.

He entered in a wild tumult, his eyes flashing. There was the old trouble on her face in permanence; but on this night he thought her dazzling and splendid.

"I have come," he said, closing the door.

"What," said she, "you not at the festival to-night?"

"I don't care for such things," he went on, "you know I don't. I got your note. *That* was festival enough for me."

"And your wife—that poor gentle thing, who somehow hates me so—she is there, I know, glittering like a star. Who can have filled her little soul with such cruel prejudices? I would give the world to be loved by her, and that she would let me love her; but she seems to fly from—to shrink from me."

At the first part of this speech Fermor's brow was contracted, but at the second some complacency came upon his face. He could give a hint of the reason of this repulsion, but he made no answer.

"It was good of you to come," she went on. "I wanted to thank you. I heard of your generous conduct. Any one else would have kept back. I did not expect it from any one, and not from you."

"What," said he, "do you not know me yet?"

"I begin to do so," she said, "but, alas! you have not begun to know *me*. It is late for one's eyes to be opening, yet not too late, I hope. Oh, I could tell you such a sad history of humiliation, which you have a right to know. But you will be generous, and spare me. I thought I was doing a holy thing—carrying out what would have been the dear wish of another; but now, not too late, I have discovered that I was in a false, wicked track. Oh, I have suffered," continued Miss Manuel, "and paid a heavy penalty for my folly—a heavy, heavy penalty indeed."

Fermor, who followed but indistinctly, for he was only thinking of the general purport of this confession, said, eagerly, "Ah, it is easy for *me* to forgive. So *you* ask me?"

"Yes," she said, "I do. And I have something else to ask, which you will not refuse. I am glad you have come to me to-night. You would save me, I know, dreary hours of remorse—what would be a life of miserable regret. You do not know what I have suffered during these few days. I have seen misery, wickedness, guilt, ruin, all coming on fast, and which I know has been my own doing, but which I have not power to stop. Oh, Fermor, think what it must be for me to look on while the innocent are hurrying to destruction—to think that this is my own doing. I have not slept; I have not lived. I have spent these days rushing through this great city, crying for help to this person and that, and now find that you are my last chance."

"What can I do?" said Fermor, hurriedly: "say it. Can I refuse anything that you ask?"

"Then, save *her*. That soft, lovable, tender thing, that I——

Oh, I can't *think* of it. I cannot speak to her. Every step I take towards her only fills her with suspicion. It is *you* who must act. Take her away! Fly this miserable place! Begone yourself! You don't know the dangers. Why, even at *this* moment while we talk——"

A light came into Fermor's eyes. "Ah, you don't know the whole of *that* story," he said. "Gentle and tender! Why, I have left a hell behind me at home. I have made the great mistake that so many make, and have found it out too late. Fly with *her*? Never! *You* talk of suffering; you don't know what *I* have suffered. I have been vilely deceived—deceived in every way. On their heads be the consequence of their own imposture! But I hope to have done with them from this night."

"How?" said Miss Manuel, with wondering eyes.

He went on, with a voice almost breathless from agitation: "Don't think that I have not been able to translate your words, and your letter; that I have not seen enough of men and women, and the world, not to know what is behind, and what is unknown even to yourself. I know what is struggling in your mind, what is the meaning of those griefs and this remorse, as you think it. I shall not go back to that Inferno! Never!"

"What?" said Miss Manuel, starting up.

"Ah! you begin to understand now," said he, still more agitated; "I think we both begin to see the light at last. Brighter days shall come for both of us. You talk of flying. Yes, let us fly; let us leave this vile place, this vile country. I have seen your struggles, your noble struggles, and shall help you by this confession. Come; what do you say? Speak! quick!"

He waited, almost panting, for an answer. Miss Manuel had listened, with a strange wonder at first, with eyes distending gradually, and then herself rising slowly from the chair, until she was standing her full height, looking down on him. Not long had he to wait. It was already written on her curling lips. He had almost a presentiment of its tone.

"*You* say this to *me*!" she said at last, with a scorn that seemed to blight and blast him. "And *this* is your confession?"

He passed his hand over his eyes, a little staggered, and drew back. "You understand me," he faltered. "We understand each other?"

"I understand you," she said. "Now I do. God forgive my blindness for not understanding you before! God forgive my

weakness and foolish repentance! God forgive me for taking you to be a weak, foolish, empty coxcomb, and not the mean—cold-souled—heartless—black-hearted—man that I now find you!"

The words were like a shower of blows, and he seemed to totter back under them, and with his hand vainly tried to clear his eyes. The utter surprise had almost taken away his wits.

"Unworthy of pity!" she went on; "unworthy of all grace! Now, indeed, the light has come! Now I see with what cold calculation you took away the life of the darling we lived for! And yet *she* prayed for you—thought of you in her last breath. Now you are destroying *another* poor child, whose only sin has been trusting too fondly to you. And you dare," she went on, with something like fury, "to come to *me* with your vile raptures, and your odious devotion. *We* understand each other! I want no such communion, indeed. Go away! Go out into the street—anywhere! Go back to your Inferno, as you call it! Leave me quickly! I can't breathe while you are here. Go!"

She kept her arm steadily pointed to the door. To the wretched Fermor, beaten, humiliated, grovelling, she seemed to be standing over the couch of the lost Violet, like an Avenger. With his hand still before his eyes he shrank to the door. And as he crept away out to the street, so degraded that he loathed his own personal consciousness, curiously the idea that was haunting him, and the gnawing reproach that rung in his ears like a knell, was that that foolish, blundering, awkward Hanbury, superior in this, had given him warning. This was, indeed, the last stroke of his humiliation.

He did not know at the moment, as he stood on the steps, looking up and down to both ends of the street, how near that unselfish Hanbury was to him. Hanbury had hurried from Mrs. Fermor eagerly, and now at the upper end of that quiet thoroughfare, saw some one come out of Miss Manuel's house. There was a lamp at the door, and under this lamp he saw Fermor's white face as it looked wildly up and down. He did not care to meet him then, and he revolted at the infatuation which took him there; so he stopped, and then he saw Fermor turn vacantly, and take the direction up the end which led away from Town. He noted his uncertain, tottering walk, and his figure get gradually lost in the darkness. Hanbury was about crossing the street, when he saw Miss Manuel's door open suddenly, and another figure burst out, and hurry up the street in the direction Fermor had taken. He knew the coal-black eyes

and the dark beard of Miss Manuel's brother, and the same lamp, which had shown him Fermor's blank pale face and yellow moustache, showed him the wild, excited features and fierce eyes of Louis Manuel.

John Hanbury was slow of thought; conclusions did not ordinarily flash upon him as they did upon other men. Manuel's figure has passed into the distant darkness, and Hanbury had his hand upon the door-bell before the idea had occurred to him to question why Louis Manuel should rush out so excitedly after Fermor. *Then* something like an instinct of the scene above described, as it had really occurred, came upon him, and with something like terror he went down the steps again, and followed hastily.

The miserable Fermor, shrinking from himself as if he were spotted over with some disease, kept wandering on through that dark night. He scarcely knew where he was going. He shrank from taking a direction which could lead in any way towards his home. From Alfred-place was not far to that broad district where were the spreading clayey fields, not yet built upon, where in a year or so the monster building for the Exhibition was to rise, and a new town of plaster mansions. Fashion, on this night, had not quite made up her mind, nor gathered up her skirts, for a race in this direction. The clayey fields were only cut up here and there by a stray row of houses, and lit by a stray lamp; and into this lonely district Fermor found himself suddenly plunged. The openness and loneliness gave him relief. He was recovering a little from the awful blow—the blow to his pride. To what had been the purpose of his later life? A stroke to his overpowering vanity, and to that vanity which was so mixed with selfishness as to be more selfishness than vanity, was to him like a physical stroke or dislocation. A sense of dull pain was in his head, and the cool of the fields seemed to relieve his moral sufferings. Luckless, miserable, degraded Fermor almost deserved pity.

In a dull sort of fashion, he began to "see it all," as it is called. the whole course of later events, with the secret of Miss Manuel's calculating plans, which his own blind infatuation had prevented him from comprehending. Beyond that, too, his mind travelled back, and that strange expression of hers, "taken away the life of Violet," brought up the old Eastport times again. The soft gentleness, the quiet suffering, the grateful tender worship—these were things that some one seemed to whisper to him for the first time. Rough hands were levelling

the rude stone wall of stolid vanity—as iron as that stone wall against which he had dashed on the Eastport race-day, now so long ago—and he was seeing things with wonder he had never seen before.

A dull crash about his head—physical—and really like that crash at the Eastport wall—a flash of stars—a dull thunder in the ears—a fierce cry like a threat, mixed up with a sound like “*This from Violet! This from Violet!*” and Fermor’s humiliation and degradation, his dreams of Eastport and of the past, were battered into insensibility. He was on the ground, with his back on the clayey soil, the white face turned to the sky, and a figure over him, fearfully beating and mashing; pounding that white face with something held in its hands. Some half-dozen terrible strokes in all. And there would have been but one more to finish the work, but for a strong man who came rushing and shouting across the field, and who caught the wild, frantic figure by the throat, and, after a struggle, flung him to a distance.

Miserable Fermor was breathing still.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTY-SEVENTH.

AN OLD SOLDIER’S END.

AT Lady Laura Fermor’s the entertainment went forward. The carriages came and went. From the street, the shadows of Captain Vansittart and Miss Egerton of Rushley were seen outlined on the illuminated balcony, as if “projected” from a magic lantern. Sounds of muffled music came from within; of the stirring horn and tinkling harp. For the tableaux were over now, and the dancing had set in.

There had been unavoidable omissions in the little show. Mr. Romaine had been seen to go, but had never returned. His dress, a rich one, was lying there. Mrs. Fermor had not come at all. Here was the most effective scene spoiled. The rest were, in truth, a little halting. In short, it came upon the actors and audience with a surprise that there should have been so small a result, after all the extraordinary cost, and trouble, and expense. It was a relief when “the decks were cleared,” and Revel’s band began to wind out music, and the company to float on the soft billows of a divine Strauss valse.

Lady Laura, at the door, working the fan in her pale fingers, still kept to her duty. At times, during the night, Blanche had come to her privately, in some little trouble about the absent Spendlesham. The mother reassured her. "He has missed a train. He has sent. He will be here in the morning to apologise. Go and dance now, dear, and enjoy yourself." The well-trained Blanche always reflected her mother's tone of mind, and saw that there was not a cloud of doubt in the air. With a smile she tripped away, and was presently flying round, supported by Captain Singleman's strong arm, to the celestial air of the "Wien mein sinn" waltz. The same strain had drawn many more from their seats, and absorbed them into the *mêlée*.

Lady Laura looked rather tired. She gave herself no rest. She found partners for the destitute. This night she did not care to receive any scandalous stories from some of her favourite worldly old men. It was a long and weary night. A young destitute girl, sadly unprepossessing—for whom she had provided—said to her gratefully, "Dear Lady Laura, you should sit down. You are tiring yourself." But she did not sit down. She worked on, and looked for plenty of physical action. How many spectres had she dancing before her eyes that night, besides her company? Almost everything there furnished her one: Blanche's silken slip, the temporary stage, and Revel's fine Strauss music. There was besides, up-stairs, and outside, Blanche's trousseau, newly come home from that terrible Madame Adelaide; and above all, indistinct, and in the distance, but not less terrible, the rude and furious job-master. No wonder that old heart was chilled—chilled even to death.

By half-past two they were going. There was the departing chorus of the "delightful evening," and the "so pleasant." The ghosts of the Strauss melodies still floated in the air. The rooms were cleared with a rush, as it were, just as they had filled with a rush. The waxed floor shone and glittered under the lights—here and there was a flower, a bit of swansdown, a bit of lace—waifs or strays of the wreck. Below, they were long getting on their wraps. And Lady Laura, leaning on the chimney-piece, heard the hoarse cries in the street, and the 'num of voices in the hall, and the happy salutations of lingering men.

"It was a delightful party," said Laura junior, in great spirits. "They were all pleased."

"Yes, dear," said Lady Laura, in the new soft tone which mystified her daughters. "I am so glad you enjoyed yourself. Go up and go to bed as quickly as you can. You look tired, and

we have to be out again to-morrow night." Poor working soul, she could not forget duty!

The two girls went together, meaning to have a short comparing of notes on the triumphs and joys of the night. Lady Laura stayed behind, her foot on the fender, with the job-master and Madame Adelaide and the other spectres for company.

Presently she went up to her room. During that latter part of the night, staying so much at the doors, she had put on an old scarlet opera cloak, and wrapped it about her neck. Not that she cared, or found much comfort in it, but she did not forget that there was to be duty on the next night.

The girls, rapturously photographing the joys of the night, heard Lady Laura call softly to Blanche, who came in. Lady Laura, still in the opera cloak, shut the door, and then said, "Blanche, my dear, I want to tell you something—can you bear a disappointment?" And then, making as light of it as she could, told all about Lord Spendlesham. Blanche burst into passionate tears. Her mother consoled her, and even with effect.

"I am not sorry," she said. "He was a foolish creature, and you would have had great trouble with him. He was a mere boy. There were great obstacles from the beginning, in fact. I never reckoned on it regularly. Now go to bed, dear, and put it out of your head. I shall put it all out of *my* head. To-morrow I shall see him and manage him, dear. Some wicked people have got round him; or, if the worst comes to the worst, we shall think of something else, and, I suppose," she added, with an odd smile, "shall begin it all again in the morning!"

The brilliancy of the night was already before Blanche's eyes, and made her receive the artificial encouragement. She had never fancied young Spendlesham, and there had been a handsome baronet that night, single, and with the other virtues. She had more faith in that dismal anthem of her mother's, "Begin it all again in the morning!" She was struck, too, by the unwonted softness of that consolation, and coming back, when half way from the door, kissed her mother—an unfrequent ceremony, for which there was rarely time. When she was gone out, her mother dropped wearily into a chair before her dressing-glass, and then the old favourite spectres—headed by furious Madame Adelaide—all poured in afresh.

Blanche went in to her sister to find sisterly sympathy. She told her all her mortifications and sorrows, and found some comfort. The single and handsome baronet hovered in the distance, as a sort of transparency. For more than an hour they

talked of it, and of a hundred other things, taking off their finery as they went along. Laura junior, full of *her* hopes and prospects, told her story. At last they heard four strike, and with a start they thought of Duty for the next night, and Laura junior laid her head upon the pillow.

"Mamma has some plan, I know," said Blanche, "for she said she would begin it all again to-morrow. She will manage Spendlesham, I dare say. I am sure she has some clever thing in her head. I wonder who it is? I shall just run in and see. Or is she in bed?"

She went in softly. "Why, mamma——" she said, for Lady Laura was still sitting before the glass, with the flowers on her head, and the red opera cloak still about her. She was sitting, as she had sat many times before, waiting for her maid to come and begin to do her hair, when going out to the old call of Duty. "Why, mamma," said Blanche—and, running up, gave a cry—rather a shriek.

At least she was at her post, and in her old uniform. After all, it is at his post, and in the field, that the veteran should most of all choose to meet his death. That notion of "beginning it all again to-morrow," had sent a chill to the nerves and muscles of the heart. The old spirit was there, and she would have been at the front again on the morrow, "beginning all" once more; but the old strength had at last given way. She was not built of iron. "Begin again to-morrow!" She had often done *that*, under circumstances as hopeless; but now it seemed to be shouted at her by the hoarse voices of the spectres.⁶ And so the heart of the poor struggling gallant soldier cracked, and in her flowers, and in her cloak, and before her dressing-glass, she slept off into quite another and more awful world, where she was "to begin again in the morning," and where there were happily no balls nor dresses, no struggle, no flowers, no fans; no battling with bills, nor infuriated milliners, nor job-masters; but where it is to be hoped she found at least rest.

L'ENVOI.

WE draw on to the end. Now that some years are between that night and this time, we see some of the figures in this story in conditions such as the intelligent reader of stories can almost fancy for himself. About the next day or so after that unhappy party of Lady Laura's, we can see the worn and spent old diplomatist, Sir Hopkins, who for weeks was flitting and fluttering about offices and ante-rooms, totter down eagerly to a cab. "Foreign-Office," he calls out, "and as quick as you can." That morning he has heard of the death of the governor of the Lee Boo Island. "It is very hard," he thinks to himself. "They treat me any way! They forget my old services. It is shameful! And now to put me off with that wretched place! I suppose I must take it." And, grumbling and indignant, he sent in his card to Harding Hanaper. "I shall try for something else," said Sir Hopkins, "before I consent to *that*." Poor soul! his heart was in office—office of some shape, and sort—Foreign Office "candle snuffing, even," if there was such employment.

Harding Hanaper was very busy. A mail was going out that night. "Good God, how that man plagues us!" (Yet it was more than a month since Sir Hopkins had seen him.) "I can't see him! I won't see him! What does he want? Tell him to put it in writing." But Sir Hopkins was not to be put off like the common petitioners. His worn face found its way in. "The Lee Boo Island," he said, panting aloud, "is vacant. They have kept me so long, and altogether treated me so badly, so I suppose, Hanaper, I must be content with that—faute de mieux, as old Pichegru used to say."

"Where's Ridley's last paper?" said Harding Hanaper, with his face bent over documents, as if he was going to cool it in copious cold water. "Send down for it. Have a copy made of this—quick. Oh! well, what is it now, Pocock?"

"You know, of course you do, the Lee Boo Island is vacant. Baines died there last April."

"Ah, yes, to be sure. You were asking for it—I remember—I dare say. But you should think about it—a man of your time of life, you know—climate, and all that——"

"Oh, I have considered that," said Sir Hopkins. "So, if there is nothing else going, I am sure, after all my long services, and really after having arranged those Waipiti troubles——"

"Ah, exactly," said Mr. Hanaper, wearily; "that's a long time ago. Besides, they broke out again the other day, you know. By the way, about the Lee Boo Island. The chief was down himself here last night, asking about it. What was that, Manning? Now, Sir Hopkins, I am up to my eyes—mail going out, you know—Manning will tell you everything."

Manning said to Sir Hopkins, "Sorry, sir, about the Lee Boo, but the chief said he was keeping it for Trail. In fact, he has given it to him."

"Given it to him!" shrieked Sir Hopkins. "What is the meaning of this? It is shameful, disgraceful! I'll expose the whole system. I'll bring it before Parliament! What do they mean? What do *you* mean?"

And with his face contorted and crumpled into lines of piteous agony, he looked from one to the other.

"Hush, hush!" said Mr. Hanaper; "recollect the office, Sir Hopkins."

"I'll bring it before Parliament," said the unhappy diplomatist. "I'll appeal to the country. This is the way old and faithful servants are treated. It shall be taken up, I can tell you. I'll——"

"Now, Sir Hopkins, we are busy, as you see. We can't have this sort of thing. Please let us go to business."

"And Miss Manuel telling me. She promised—you know she did."

Hanaper smiled.

"If that was your prop, Sir Hopkins, it was a reed, and a broken one. I don't think you are number one *there*. Better to tell you, for the next time."

Wretched Sir Hopkins went his way almost staggering—all crow's feet, as it were. From that little churchyard at Eastport a skeleton hand seemed to reach him.

We can see Major Carter, older and more worn and not so crisp—with a Mrs. Carter—flitting round the watering-places he loved, making acquaintances. Some powerful friends had come forward on that exposé, and the words, "Shameful conspiracy," were used pretty frequently. It was found by the Crown officials that the capital case was very weak indeed—so weak, that it was not advisable to think of a trial. It must be said, too, that the shareholders in the Irrefragable were dissatisfied with the exposé. Yet Major Carter, handsomely cleared, and gone abroad, wisely forbore to press his claim on the company; and, by a sort of mutual compromise, the dead past was allowed to

bury its own dead. Faithful, trusting Mrs. Wrigley believed in him all the time, and went abroad with him. And, it must be said, that Major Carter could always appeal to his treatment of the second Mrs. Carter as a sufficient refutation of the "foul slanders" that had been heaped upon him in reference to the first. And there at Homburg, or some such place, he met Mr. Romaine, who, however, "cut" him—and cut him insolently.

Now, too, is Pauline Manuel at rare intervals on English ground: when she comes to see a brother, who is placed in a quiet asylum, where his wildness is soothed and tempered on the gentlest principles. At other seasons, she too hovers about the foreign world, and, wherever she goes, people wonder at her sad handsome face, and think there must be some story connected with her.

Now, too, at a quiet cathedral town, on the grass and walks of the close, under the friendly skirt of the cathedral itself, live three persons together. The cathedral is not rich, nor has it a numerous ecclesiastical chapter. A railway has not touched it yet: so very few remark the grim old man and his daughter, and the feeble husband, whom they both support. The feeble husband walks as though a false step would shatter his frame like glass or china. The feeble husband's eyes are dim, and grow dimmer each day, and round and about the eyes his face has been crushed and bruised out of shape through an old and terrible accident. A skilful doctor did wonders with that face, raising it, and piecing it, and restoring it (he wrote "a case" on it for some Medical Transactions); but he could not "raise" or restore the quick intuition and ready appreciation, and so every one in the cathedral town knows that the feeble husband's words come from him more slowly than he walks (as though *they* run risk, too, of being shattered), and that it takes a long time to follow a question or a remark.

Of this old and dreadful accident he ought to have died properly, but the skilful doctor saved him. As his eyes grow more dim, so does his intelligence; keeping pace with the failing of the eyes. It seems long, long ago. Sometimes, no doubt, the dull thickness clears away—the murky vapours in his brain clear away; and perhaps he then, for a moment, sees the old soft days down at the watering-place, when he seemed to be young, and airy, and elegant, and happy; and these bright figures moved to and fro before him. It was another Fermor then, different from the Fermor who came later, and who, in its turn, was different from the old young man, and the bruised, beaten Fermor, whose

dim eye was, as it were, at the glass of a stereoscope. These were but sudden glimpses—but short glimpses too. Then the clouds would come rolling in from side to side. Local doctors give him but a few years. Then there will be a choral service in the cathedral, with minor canons chanting seraphically, and a tablet on the aisle-walls with the inscription "Charles Fermor," with birth, death, and all the rest. But not a word, of course, of the old vanities, and selfishness, and weakness, and the poor old mauled *το εγω*, or "le moi." On those Kensington fields it was battered out of all shape. When the men of his regiment come to hear of that demise, some of them will say, "Poor Fermor!" They will balance his character, and some good will be discovered. It will be universally agreed "it was all that infernal conceit of his." The military verdict would be about right. That ludicrous vanity was at the bottom of all. It might have been "drawn" when he was a boy, just as his double teeth might have been drawn. But there was no one to think of taking him to the moral dentist's.

Young Brett, faithful to him to the end, often made trips down to the cathedral town, and walked by Fermor's side round the close, and spoke to him with an assumed gaiety and cheerfulness as "old fellow." And with him is seen lonely Hanbury, who flits and hovers about the place. Many mothers said what "a purposeless life he led!" And the dim dull eyes from which the colour of conceit had been long washed out, rested on the honest boy with a greater intelligence, and much comfort. Perhaps it was at such moments that the clouds broke, and the old Eastport sun came out for a few seconds. The young wife found inexpressible comfort when she saw Brett's brave face near them. He knew the art of manly comfort, and could impart it. He always went away himself in deep distress, but left a little cheerfulness behind.

He could take a kind and gentle view of Fermor's course—at least a pitying one—as, indeed, perhaps the kind reader, who has listened to this story so far, may perhaps be inclined to do. Poor miserable foolish Fermor! Even here, looking back on this story, we may think of him gently, with some allowance, and at least draw a moral from his course.

Sometimes his faithful wife hears him articulate with difficulty the name of Violet. Far away on the coast of Eastport, which is thriving, and gorgeous with plaster palaces and assembly-rooms, and has its bathing machines, and pony carriages, with infant postilions, in whose social warp and woof gold pieces

seemed to be woven in—which has its two seasons, its express trains from Town for business men—to which doctors order patients—at Eastport, so flourishing, so magnificent and pampered, strange to say, this little romance has been kept alive. It has not been choked out by the briars. The story is as well known as that of Tolla at Rome. The tradition is loved, and familiar to the bathing-women on the beach. And most young girls, having heard the outline from the maid in the lodgings, or from the women on the beach, find their way to a sheltered corner of the now crowded graveyard, where charming flowers come up thickly, watched periodically by a plain good honest country gentleman, and tended carefully by a professional gardener of reputation, in the pay of a lady abroad—where there are rings and bands of choicest colours, and where, on a simple granite headstone, is carved the pretty name of

“VIOLET”

THE END

